THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 54, Number 2 Fall 2024

Stand Up, Vote, Fight Back

Bill Branson

From the National Office

Once again, we must confront our sinking feelings about our country. Do we hold the line, move forward, or do we plummet into fascism? We know that sinking feeling in the pit of our stomachs and that feeling of existential dread. We also know the feeling of elation when our righteous struggles are victorious.

To say we're too old for this shit is an understatement. We learned long ago that the rich would have us fight their wars, treat us like shit afterward, and do what they can to steal our benefits and care. We know it shouldn't be a zero-sum game. Still, we know the more money spent on wars, whether aiding the Ukrainians in their struggle against Russian domination or aiding and abetting the brutal slaughter the Israelis are perpetrating on the Palestinians under the guise of self-defense, the less they claim there is for the health and well being of the majority of us. The rich are profiting from these wars. Death and destruction are not what we support.

We are still reeling from the first four years of the Trump Administration. We dread four more. His continual disdain and contempt for veterans is apparent, whether he is using Arlington National Cemetery as a backdrop to shill for his campaign or continuing his attacks on the VA. The Veterans Health Care Institute says Trump plans to finish the VA demolition job launched in his first administration.

His re-election could precipitate a dangerous slide into fascism. We need to focus on protecting democracy against fascism. We must take the materialist view of this situation—people gotta vote. If not, a fascist party will enshrine itself. Everything isn't perfect; both parties have problems, but fascism is the main issue. We are on the verge of two regional wars in Europe and the Middle East. Enshrining a Nazi-esque dictator and fascist party will not improve our ability to effect change.

We fought and continue to struggle for change because we believe a better United States is possible. A better world is possible. While we fought an unnecessary war, we are under no illusion that our service helped the American people in any way. Our fighting back and fighting for change helped make the US a better place. We know that the bonds we forged and the lives we changed had way more impact than our picking up a rifle for Uncle Sam. Being under the jackboot of the rich is not a place to get out of these wars. The only way to influence and deal with stopping these wars is with a government we can deal with.

We know a more just, humane, and equitable world is possible. We know the policies we have fought for over the past five-plus decades can and will help those in need. We know the resources of the US can be put to helping people instead of engaging in pointless warfare, walls, and other distractions that put us down and enrich the ruling class.

We cannot predict who will be president when you read this (and if you read this before the elections, please take action: get out and vote), but we do know this: our mission

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VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

VVAW

VVAW continues our exciting work with Chuck Theusch, Khoi Tran, and the Library of Vietnam Project. Thanks to a generous donation left to us in the will of a VVAW member, we are working on plans to build our **FOURTH** Library and Learning Center in Vietnam. This will be our largest library to date. This Library and Learning center will be at the Hanh Minh Secondary School, Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province. Plans are being drawn up in contemplation of the Library Project's 25th Anniversary, roughly coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of Vietnam's Independence, April 30, 2025.

Here are some updates on the Library and Learning Centers we have funded.

From our first library at the Pho Vinh Secondary School (grades 6-9), Duc Pho town, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

"We are extremely grateful to you, the Vietnam Library Project Organization, and the sponsors for building an open reading garden that meets the needs of studying and researching library resources for our students.

In 2021, we determined that it was necessary to develop the school's culture and improve the quality of education. When the Library of Vietnam Project built the library, all the students, teachers, staff, and local people here were grateful and proud to have a spacious, modern place with a rich source of books to read, study, and research.

After the inauguration of the library, our staff unanimously contributed to improving the quality of the library, bringing the reading culture to students and the locality. Our students happily participate in reading books every day at recess or after school. Many have become passionate about reading books and come to the library regularly. Nearly three years after the library's inauguration, we appreciate the positive impacts of library activities and the information resources we now have access to.

The third VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam nearing completion at An Nghia Secondary School, September 14, 2024.

Please send our thanks and best wishes to the sponsors."

Suong Vo Thi Thanh
Principal

From our second library at the Hanh Trung Primary School (grades 1-5), Hanh Nghia District, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam

"The Library has long been considered the "golden treasure" of national culture and is an indispensable part of school culture. The library is a place to supplement and update new knowledge and make teaching methods lively and attractive. The Hanh Trung Primary School has constantly offered exciting activities at the library to promote reading among students, bringing them closer to the

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More VVAW Library photos on page 8.

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

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Stand Up, Vote, Fight Back

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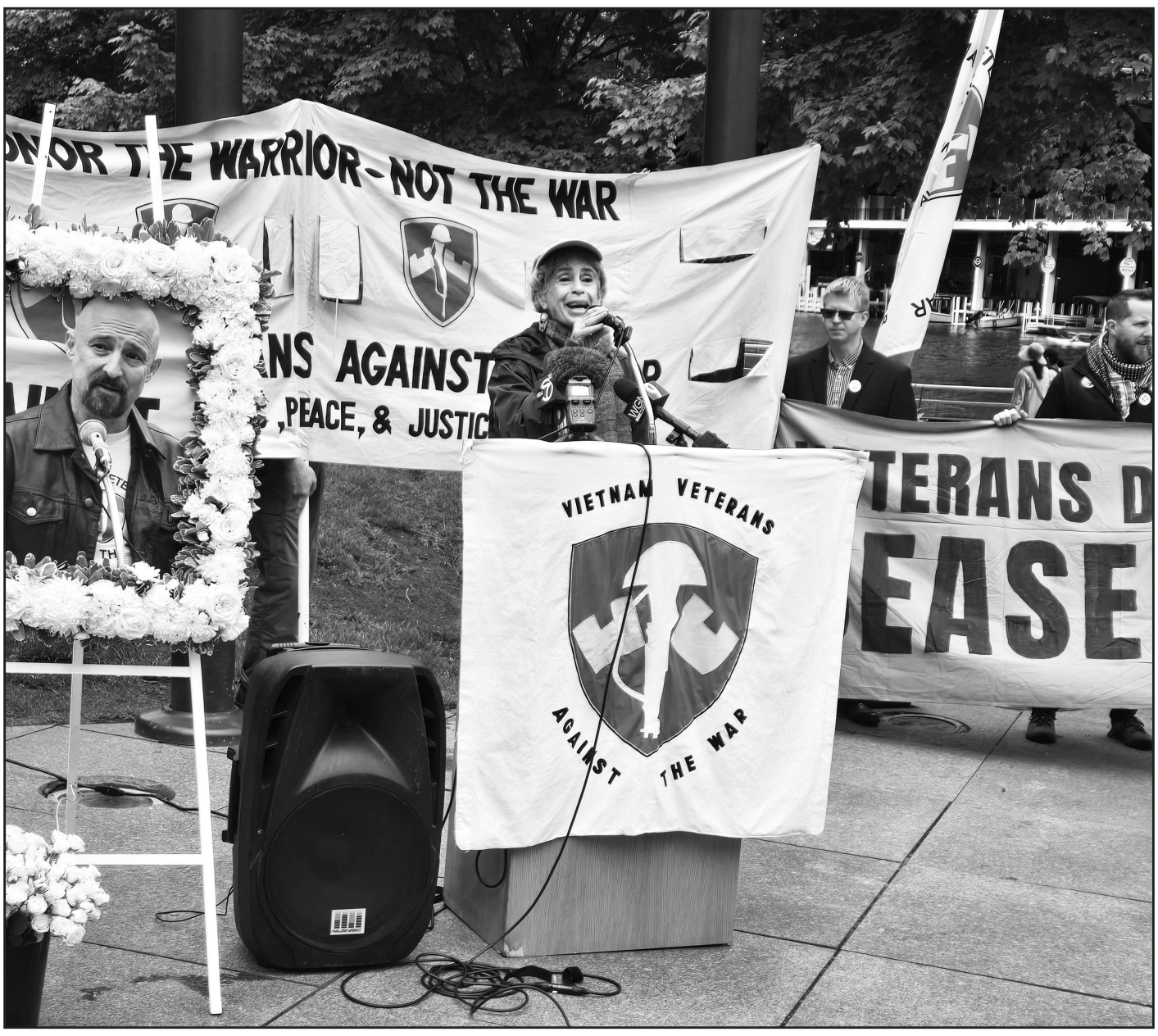
remains as crucial as ever regardless of who is in the White House. Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was founded in 1967, over fifty-seven years ago, to fight for peace, justice, and the rights of all veterans. The struggle continues perhaps more than ever these days. VVAW has never stopped working to protect the welfare of those who served our country.

When the outcome of the elections means protecting and preserving (or defunding and dismantling) programs—like VA benefits, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—that concretely improve millions of people's lives, then we choose to exercise our right to vote in this less-than-ideal situation. We don't live in a world where we have the luxury to vote only for perfect candidates. The corruption in this system may make us cynics, but we are also realists. Organizing and voting to win some partial, though incomplete, progress takes maturity and life experience. We need to bring our hard-learned lessons home. We are not in our twenties anymore. The average age of a Vietnam vet is over 75. We are the ones using Social Security and Medicare benefits, the very benefits a particular candidate running for office wants to take away from us and our children and grandchildren.

It is time for the US to stop waging war and begin waging peace. The money wasted on bombs, planes, drones, and military adventures could easily be used towards providing free public health care to the whole country, free education for the entire country, and bolster programs to take care of the sick and elderly, especially as our countries' population and all of the baby boomers are aging. Instead, we allow our representatives and leaders to be bought and paid for by the military-industrial and energy complexes.

No matter the election's outcome, we must continue while we are still here. That is why we struggle. For peace. For justice. For veterans' rights. For a better, just world for all of us.

Bill Branson is a member of the VVAW Board.



Joan Davis recently passed away after a long battle with cancer. The Veteran will include a longer biography of all she accomplished in the next issue. Some will recall that she recently spoke at the memorial for Barry Romo. Joan was a fighter for peace, justice, love and beauty.

Veteran Staff
Jeff Machota
Bill Branson
Joe Miller

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons.Thanks to Chuck Theusch, Khoi Tran, Ed Damato, Sharri Gertler, Aaron Hughes, Fred Samia, Bhavia Wagner, and others for contributing photos.

The Veteran is available online, article by article, or as a downloadable pdf at www.vvaw.org/veteran/

Thanks to those who have put VVAW in their wills. These gifts have have helped VVAW keep on keeping on and have contributed to the building of libraries in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will and don't know how, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

VVAW Merchandise

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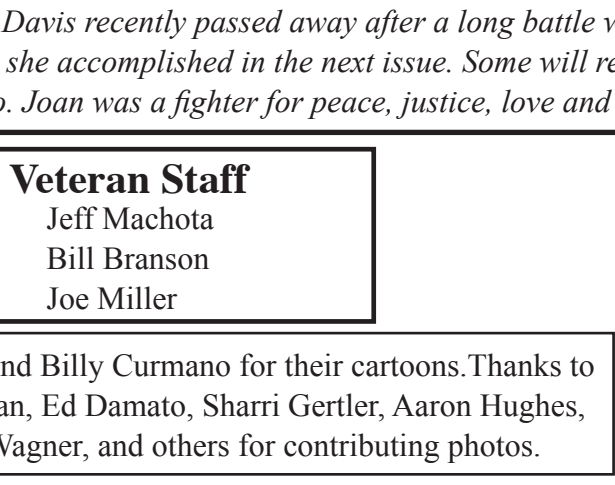
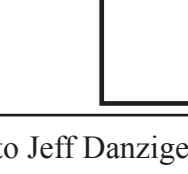
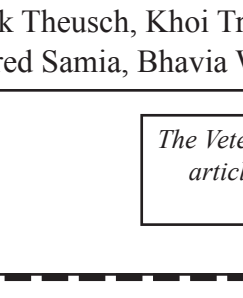
Vietnam Veterans Against the War
Fighting for Veterans, Peace and Justice since 1967
www.vvaw.org







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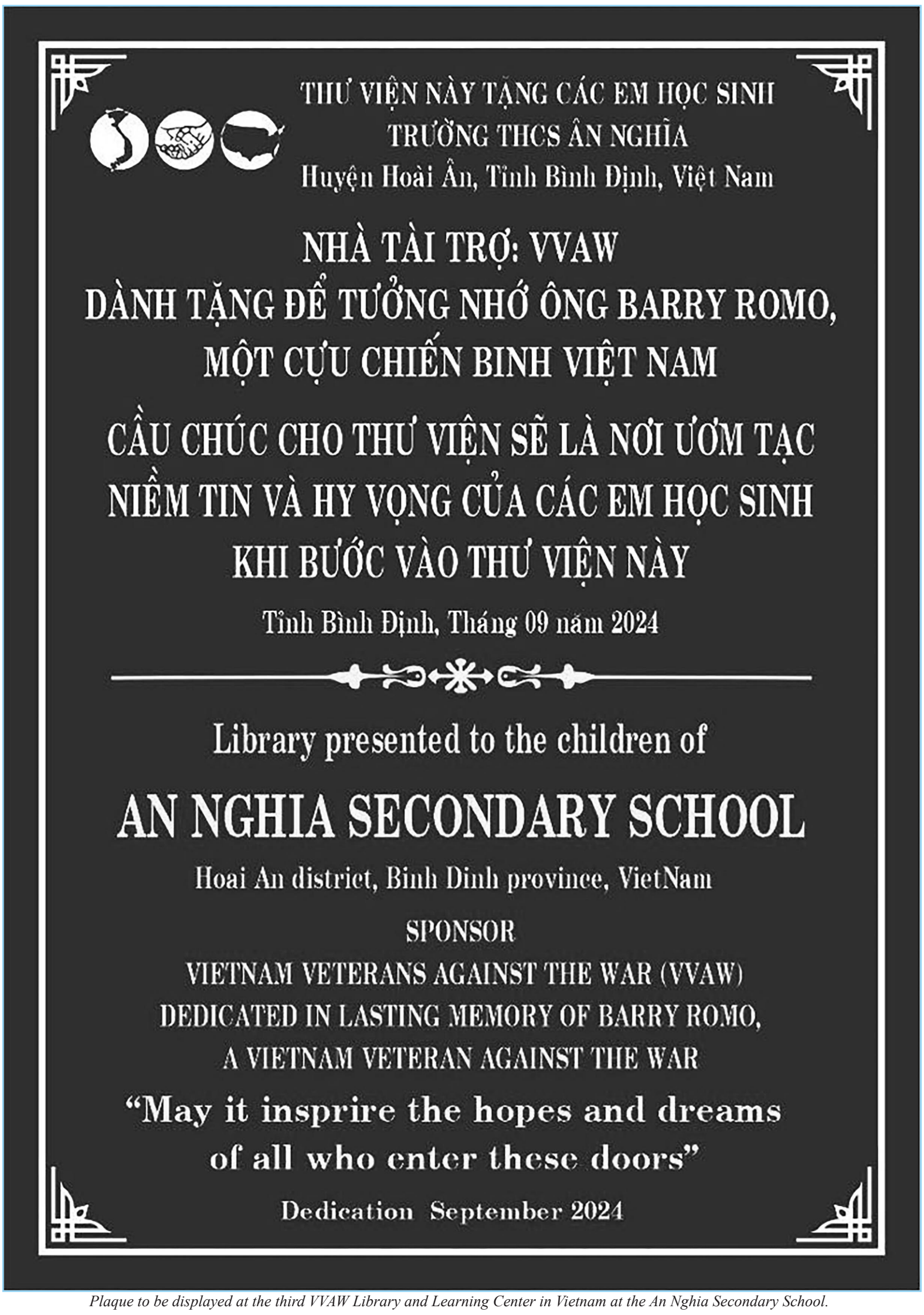

Plaque to be displayed at the third VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam at the An Nghia Secondary School.

VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

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treasure of knowledge of humanity. From there, we teach joy and passion for reading and maintain a reading culture among students.

In May 2023, all teachers, staff, and students of Hanh Trung Primary School joyfully received an extremely spacious library from the Vietnam Library Organization and the Quang Ngai Province Children's Fund. The library has bookshelves and computers to keep up with the current digital technology age.

The first impression of the library is of a spacious, well-lit space. Books are arranged and classified neatly according to each topic. The corners are decorated in an extremely friendly, eye-catching, and lively manner, suitable for elementary school ages. Every day at recess, children come to the library very enthusiastically. Each day of the week will be reserved for each grade level to freely go inside and experience useful activities.

The school, local community, parents, and students of Hanh Trung would like to sincerely thank the Vietnam Library Organization and the Children's Fund of Quang Ngai Province and will forever consider this library our closest companion."

Ms. Tu
Headmaster

Construction is mainly completed at the third Vietnam Veterans Against the War sponsored Library and Learning Center at the An Nghia Secondary School (grades 6-9), An Nghia Village, Binh Dinh Province in Vietnam. The library will be placed into service around October 1, 2024. The People's Committee will let us know when the date is set for the Dedication Celebration.

We plan to post the following in the library for all to see: "Dedicated to the lasting memory of Barry Romo, a Vietnam Veteran Against the War."

The teachers and students were asked about VVAW's new addition to education at the An Nghia School.

"The Library is a treasure trove of human knowledge, provides entertainment after stressful hours, and a place for self-study and self-education enriching cultural knowledge."

"The Library nurtures dreams and aspirations and it is a bridge for teachers as well as students to knowledge outside the An Nghia Village."

"The Library is a place to take pride in the traditions of one's homeland."

"The new library at our school is important to the students. We have never had a library at this school so they have not had a place to learn how to learn. Thank you to all who have donated to it. The kids are excited now; schools have started, and there is a new library. Big Thank You for Computers and Big Screen TV."—*Mr. Dang Van Nhuong, Headmaster, An Nghia Middle School.*

"The Library is coming together quickly now. Soon it will be used. Thank You VVAW sponsors."

Khoi Tran

Nothing can make the loss of VVAW members less painful, but the major gift left to us by one recently passed member will help current and future generations of Vietnamese children learn and grow.

We still need to raise funds to complete our new library in 2025 and continue to support our existing libraries, so your support is essential. If you want to include VVAW in your will but don't know how, please contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Thanks to all who have made this project grow.

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

I wrote this mid-September, so I don't know what happened in the election.

What I do know is that one issue always comes up when these right-wingers are involved. I'm talking about immigration. They talk about the migrants taking jobs from the rest of us. And they slander. The slander often takes the form of innuendos about criminal activities, which are actually few and far between. Most often, these things are said by people with immigrants in their families.

I am a grandchild of immigrants of whom I am proud. Most of them, anyway. My grandmother was a peasant lady living in Lithuania. 1906, the Lithuanians revolted against their Russian oppressors and were easily put down. My grandmother, her brother, and her boyfriend left. They had to traverse a snowy forest to get to Finland, bribing Russian soldiers along the way. Eventually, she made it to the States and the Chicago area. My grandfather had some questionable health issues and was sent to Argentina. After six to eight months, he came here, and they were reunited.

Life here wasn't easy. She had two children. The youngest, my father, was a sickly infant. Gramma had a job cleaning downtown office buildings at night. Child care was only a dream, but she had to put food on the table at the same time she cared for my dad. So she made her own childcare. She put her child into a makeshift infant sleeping bag tied around him on one end and around her waist at the other. As she moved around scrubbing the floors, he slid along after her.

Gram saved a few nickels and opened a neighborhood store on the Southwest side of Chicago. This was when buildings in the city were sparse. Your next-door neighbor might be two or three hundred yards away.

This was during Prohibition. One of the things she sold was alcohol. She supplied the neighborhood, and the neighbors took care of her. When the revenuers tried to raid her, word got to her faster, and she would hide the still in the chicken shack, which was never cleaned. The feds would search her property. When they opened the door and got a whiff of the overwhelming smell of the chicken shit, they would decide to skip that part of the search.

There were millions of immigrant stories of those who came to this country. They endured hardships and persevered. They shaped our culture. Nowadays, some of the descendants of those immigrants are trying to keep out newer immigrants. The issue is being used by right-wing politicians who cater to the concept of "We got ours. Close the door." It also helps them that racism continues across the land. On our southern border, it's mainly brown people who are caught in limbo. And in Springfield, Ohio, the victims of racism are Black immigrants who are already settled. The history of immigration has people and events of which you can be proud and those that make you ashamed.

Romo

In January of 1973, the last large demonstration against the Vietnam War took place in Washington, DC. Barry Romo was to give a speech. He had recently come to Chicago to work in the National Office. We hadn't known each other. We said hello, got into my car, and headed out, driving to DC. We marched. He spoke. We socialized for a couple of hours and then headed back to Chicago, driving through the night. That meant we'd be driving through the night not having slept for 36 hours. We planned to drive until sleepy and, at that point, stop and wake the other one to drive another 25 minutes or so. Anyway, that's how we met and became friends. Maybe such an experience creates a bond.

So, I would like to salute Barry Romo for all he did to help keep VVAW relevant through the years and for his work to promote peace and justice. Open a beer, raise your glass, and salute a manly man.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author, and long-time VVAW member.

Pete Zastrow and Barry Romo presenting a VVAW painting to Vietnam/My (Vietnam/American) Friendship Society in Hanoi, Vietnam, May 1987.

Bill Davis (left), Mayor Harold Washington (middle), Carlos Cortez (3rd from right), Barry Romo (right) in Chicago, 1983.

Gerald McCarthy: Haunted Marine, VVAW Activist, College Professor

Jan Barry (reviewer)

Hitchhiking Home from Danang: A Memoir of Vietnam, PTSD and Reclamation
by Gerald A. McCarthy
(McFarland, 2024)

For over 30 years, students at a small Catholic college in upstate New York took composition and literature courses taught by a quirky professor named Gerald McCarthy. Some were appalled to discover that their English prof had gone AWOL from the Marines after a tour in Vietnam and served time in jail. Others were delighted that this acerbic vet—who propelled himself into the University of Iowa Writers Workshop masters' degree program—prodded students to become better writers.

"McCarthy has led a very interesting life," one senior wrote on ratemyprofessors.com. "He draws on his experiences in his writing and encourages his students to do the same. When I was his student he really pushed me to dig deeper and do something meaningful. He's passionate about poetry and creative writing."

I gained insight into this dynamic while teaching journalism at the same college for several years. Gerald McCarthy also enlightened his students by bringing avant-garde poets addressing war and social issues as guest speakers.

Retired now as a professor of English at St. Thomas Aquinas College, McCarthy has dug deep into his past to produce an astounding volume of literature. *Hitchhiking Home from Danang: A Memoir of Vietnam, PTSD and Reclamation* (McFarland, 2024) reveals the inner world of many war veterans that home folks haven't a clue about.

"You come home alone and no one knows what it's like…the aloneness would not let go of me, it clung like a mist or a shadow, and I couldn't shake it," he writes. "I felt like there was a stranger in the room, someone I hardly knew—and the stranger was me. Alone, aloof, apart. It stayed and grew and became my 'thing' and I could not shake it or find a way out of the despair and unrest it brought."

Some things happened in Vietnam that he couldn't talk about. He couldn't find words for what troubled him when he went AWOL from a Marine base in Norfolk, Virginia. He couldn't blurt it out when he ended up in jail, in a military brig, and in a Navy hospital psychiatric ward. He couldn't say anything years later when his 18-year-old son asked what had happened.

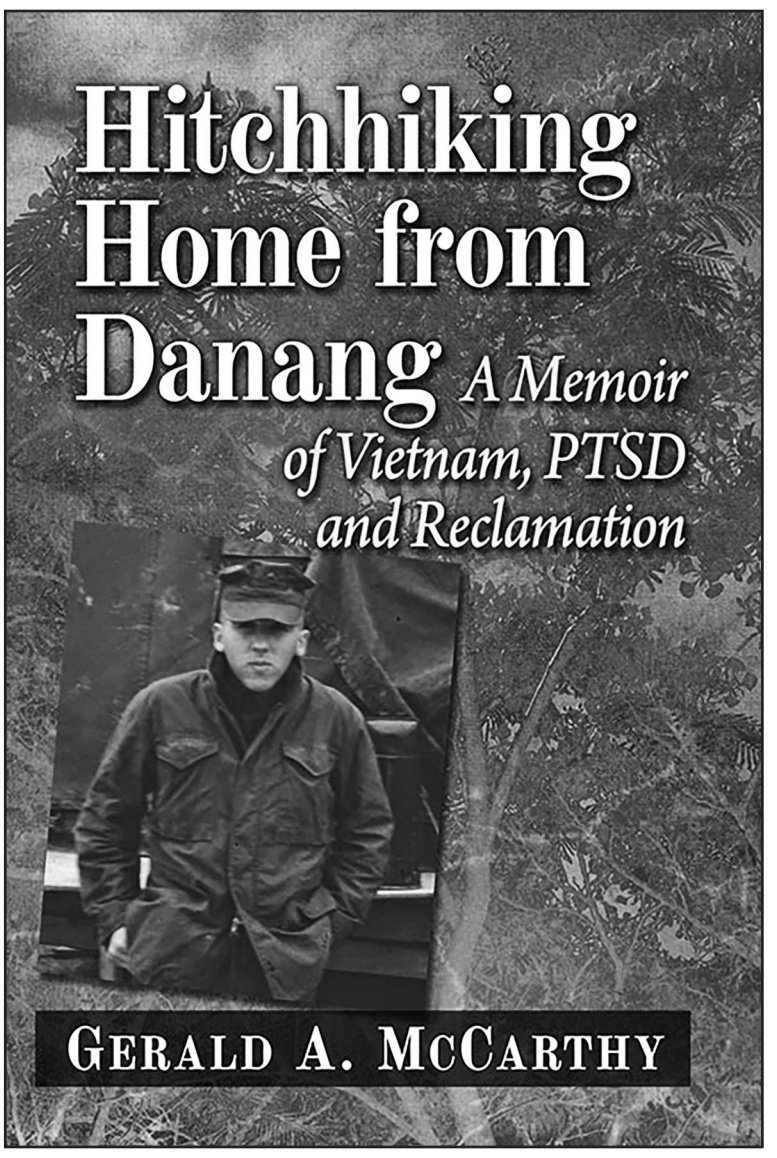
"I tell Nate, 'Well, I just left, I'd had enough of it, you know.' And I think that's close to the truth, but I'm leaving things out on purpose," he writes. "I'm leaving out the nightmares, the waking sweats… I'm not telling him about the flashbacks, about the dead, about the other stuff."

There were no words for what to say about the war for 19-year-old combat vets coming home in 1967. Words like post-traumatic stress and survivor guilt did not yet exist. Grief was not in the lexicon of a Marine. Even years later, he couldn't tell his wife about the damn disturbing dreams that kept popping up.

"My wife shakes me in the dark and asks, 'Who are you talking to? Why are you so restless?'" He couldn't tell her that sometimes he was intently talking with dead buddies, that he was suddenly remembering a sergeant's drunken screams about the horrendous casualties in the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic, the explosions of the mortar attack shortly after he got to his field unit, the mortar attack on the Danang airfield when he was about to leave for the States, the airplane burning, men scrambling out of the flames, and so many other ways Marines died in Vietnam.

"And then the others too, after I came home, after I was discharged, after all the 'military madness' had ebbed and I was drifting in a cloud of stelazine and beer and regret," he wrote. "Bill Shaw crashing his old Corvette into a tree at night… Dennis Michaels…hung himself in his parents' home…two months back from his time with the Army."

McCarthy struggled through classes at a state college. He got into the Iowa Writers Workshop, where professors told him the war was over and to write about other things. He wrote poetry about the war to try to describe it. *War Story: Vietnam War Poems* (The Crossing Press, 1977) took a crack at it. It described the elements of PTSD before the psychiatric establishment named the disorder.



That first poetry collection caught the attention of Gloria Emerson, the fabled *New York Times* war correspondent, who became a mentor. She got him an assignment to write an article about the dedication of the new Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. "You have to go down there and cover the dedication ceremony, and then you'll write a poem about it later," she told him on a telephone call. "First, you get paid to write about it, which will cover your expenses."

He reached out to other vets, joining Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He offered writing workshops for vets and taught writing at Attica prison, in migrant labor camps, county jails, and schools. By the time he became a college professor, he knew a lot about how to help other people tell their stories.

But he struggled to tell his own story. This book is focused on revealing, 50-some years after his return from war, what he found so hard to talk about. In retirement, he can no longer hide behind the sandbags he erected as a college professor who took on extra work, including teaching at the American Academy in Rome and local schools.

"Now they come back when I'm alone, and in the dusk those shadows start to materialize. I can see them—glimpse their faces—this legion," he writes. "And they are there waiting. They know I have had a life. And I have to join them at some point. I keep trying to tell a few stories, push away from what is there… I think the solution is to learn how to speak to people again, to try to communicate, to keep forcing yourself to wake up. You can't give in to the ghosts, to the grief, to the overwhelming sadness."

And he discovered another insight. "Now 50+ years later, and after four years of therapy at the James A. Peters VA Hospital in Bronx, New York, I have come to realize that the tranquilizers were a stumbling block to my recovery," he writes. "Now I know I needed therapy and counseling. Now I know the tranquilizer led to other depressants like alcohol…and drugs, to feeling depressed and full of self-loathing."

As a persistently creative poet and writer, Gerald McCarthy demonstrates in this book how he helped forge a better way of dealing with PTSD and survivor guilt: write it out.

Jan Barry is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.

Race in the Crucible of War

John Bromer (reviewer)

Race in the Crucible of War: African American Servicemen and the War in Vietnam (Culture and Politics in the Cold War and Beyond)
by Gerald F. Goodwin
(University of Massachusetts Press, 2023)

Race in the Crucible of War, by Gerald F. Goodwin, is a challenging book to read on several levels. At least it was for me.

The book's not long, under 230 pages (excluding notes), but it's densely packed with research and personal experiences. The subtitle is African American Servicemen and the War in Vietnam, and that's what it's about. I'm not Black, and I've never been to Vietnam. Part of the difficulty for me was coming to see just how thoroughly racism, discrimination, and abuse are baked into the armed forces and our country. Naive, huh?

Goodwin is a college professor of history and political science. He interviewed more than 50 African American veterans of the war and studied archives, print, and video records. I read the first 40 pages and put the book down for a few months, thinking it was primarily statistics, though there are quotes from men he interviewed throughout. When I picked it up the next time, I quickly went from interested to engrossed.

The Vietnam War was the first in which the armed forces were fully integrated. In basic training, many Blacks found the same racists and prejudices that they had lived with growing up. When they got to Vietnam, and especially in combat, a lot of that went away or was subsumed because your life depended on the men on each side of you. "The barrier of color is false," said one soldier. At the same time, "The further you got from combat, the more bullshit there was." (Anything in quotation marks is from the book)

Racism was evident in Blacks being assigned to menial duties—"the hardest, dirtiest, and most unpleasant chores"—disproportionately being sent into combat, being disciplined for petty offenses when whites were not, brought up on charges and held in pre-trial detention for months, given dishonorable discharges, the list goes on and on. Riots in military stockades, violence between Blacks and whites, fragging (a quote from a young Colin Powell who was an officer in Vietnam 1968-69—he moved his cot every night because he "did not rule out attacks on authority from within the battalion itself.")

When violence broke out between white and Black troops, it was immediately assumed by officers that the Black troops were responsible, regardless of the facts.

Goodwin cites many examples of these episodes leading to deaths. I was disappointed that he didn't say what happened to the perpetrators, but that's not the focus of this work.

The book goes into relations with the Vietnamese (and Montagnards), both fighters and civilians. It was complicated, with African American soldiers seeing similarities between oppression at home and abroad while at the same time being there to fight these people. Communist propaganda focused on telling Black Americans they should go home and fight the real battle there. The assassinations and riots in America were, of course, at their height in the late 60s and early 70s, so many Black troops had mixed feelings about the whole deal.

Even after they returned home, Black veterans were disrespected, assaulted, and, in some cases, killed by racists who only saw the color of their skin. A Black veteran on the second day of the Detroit riots—"I just got back from Vietnam a few months ago… but you know I think the war is here."

Near the end of the book are four or five pages of vets talking about their PTSD. I thought I had an idea what PTSD is, but this is chilling.

I don't write long book reviews, and this one is late, so I'll stop. There's much, much more in this book. To Black American vets, it may be, duh, old news. Or not.

To me and others, it's an eye-opener, with so much detail and information that was never reported or publicized.

It's not an easy read, but it's worth reading. It has my highest recommendation.

John Bromer is a Vietnam-era veteran and a Lifetime Member of VVAW.

I Was a Hero Once

Jan Barry (reviewer)

I Was a Hero Once
by Peter P. Mahoney
(Atmosphere Press, 2024)

Peter Mahoney was a real-life Forrest Gump. As related in his delightful memoir, *I Was a Hero Once*, the Catholic high school grad who joined the Army to prove himself came home from a combat tour in Vietnam searching for some meaning in life. An adrenaline junkie who got hooked in parachute jump school and firefights in Vietnam, he found adventures that repeatedly popped him into the midst of historic events.

Signing up for a compatible veterans' group as a college student in New Orleans, he traveled to a gathering of Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Florida and ended up in the famous Gainesville 8 trial, charged with planning to attack the 1972 Republican Convention in Miami with slingshots and fried marbles.

"Different people who participated in this discussion had very different impressions of it. My own take was that it was just an after-hours bullshit session," he wrote of the alleged conspiracy meeting. It had been called to discuss what peace actions VVAW should participate in at the Democratic and Republican conventions. Amid copious imbibing, provocative ideas were spun by guys who turned out to be FBI informants.

Startling connections emerged between this case and the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon Administration. The VVAW arrestees were used as the excuse for the infamous break-in of the Democratic Party headquarters by members of Nixon's presidential reelection campaign staff. The jury acquitted the veterans in Florida of all charges brought by a federal prosecutor who targeted peace activists.

"In spite of all this joy and elation, I can't forget that the government put me through fourteen months of hell," Peter Mahoney told the news media after the jury rejected the government's trumped-up charges.

Disgusted, he moved on to try a quiet life with VVAW comrades in Brooklyn, NY, working with a vets' theater group, editing a community newspaper, and doing odd jobs. He took up writing poetry for a veterans' poetry anthology, *Demilitarized Zones*, that I was compiling with W.D. Ehrhart. The book included seminal work by Bruce Weigl, Horace Coleman, and Gerald McCarthy, among others. Peter Mahoney helped me with the tedious work of laying out the book—in those days, gluing printed pages on paste-up boards—for an independent small press print run. We had great discussions about poetry, veteran issues, and life in Brooklyn.

And then he restlessly moved on, bouncing from New York to New Orleans and back, looking for something meaningful to do. Through veterans' networking, he got hired as the deputy director of the New York Vietnam Veterans Commission, hobnobbing with financial patrons, Donald Trump, and other top hat society types.

His job entailed collecting astounding letters by veterans about the war, which were engraved on the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial and showcased in a book called *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, which spawned an HBO documentary seen by millions of viewers.

Years later, Peter Mahoney wrote a poem, "I Was a Hero Once," that would have been a good fit for the Dear America collection. It's the frontispiece and title of his memoir. In an Author's Note, he wrote, "If I were to be called a hero, then it should be for the things I did after Vietnam."

Moving on from the literary world, he became an investment banker who had a front-row seat for the Wall Street market crash of 1987. Packing up and moving on, he joined a delegation of Vietnam vets who met up in Russia with Soviet vets of their Afghanistan War to talk about common concerns of fitting back into society and working for international peace. He met a Russian woman, married, and moved there for several years during the tumultuous aftermath of the Soviet Union's breakup.

Traveling between a home base he established for his family in Vermont and numerous airports, he nurtured an improbable career as an international development consultant—despite never having completed a college degree—working with NGOs seeking to improve social conditions in Russia, Ukraine, Haiti, Philippines, Nigeria, South Africa and elsewhere. This work put him in Russia when the government collapsed economically in 1998, and an unknown apparatchik named Vladimir Putin ended up in charge.

Ever restless, in the fall of 2016, at age 68, Peter Mahoney packed a backpack. He flew to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to join hundreds of veterans who went to help a local protest against an oil pipeline being jammed through the reservation's water supply area. The protestors were confronted by a small army of law enforcement officers using armored personnel carriers, water cannons, rubber bullets, teargas, and concussion grenades. A blizzard scattered the battered survivors.

"I wanted, for one more time in my life, to stand shoulder to shoulder with other veterans, to feel the passion and commitment of my youth, to try to make a difference even in the face of overwhelming odds," he wrote. "Sometimes in life, you have to stand up and be counted. Sometimes you have to do what is right, even if it is not successful."

Peter Mahoney alternates throughout his memoir between spinning fascinating accounts of his incredible life story and seeking lessons to share.

"I tried and failed to change the world, but I tried," he writes in a concluding chapter addressed to his children. "I hope that reading about my life can help you understand what you must do in the world I have left you."

A major thing yet to be done, he writes, is curing America's addiction to war. "Sure, we want to take credit for forcing an end to the Vietnam War," he writes of his generation of activists, "but we never changed the rampant militarism of post-WWII America."

Jan Barry is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.

PRAISE FOR

I WAS A HERO ONCE

By Peter P. Mahoney

"I cannot begin to find the words to explain the emotion and power of this book... It should be part of the American history curriculum in high schools nationwide."

— Readers' Favorite

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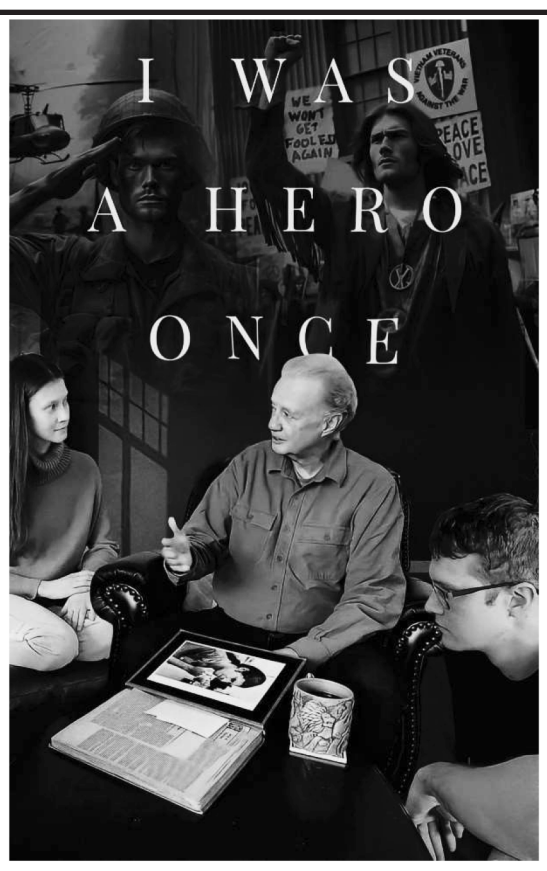


"Mahoney is a natural storyteller and his sensitivity elevates the impact of what he's been through. An astonishing piece of literature. Let us celebrate his achievement!"

— Lamont B. Steptoe, Vietnam Veteran, award-winning poet & author

VVAW at Clinton Square, New York on Veterans Day, November 11, 1971.

Bong Son Library

John Picciolo

I graduated from Joliet Junior College in 1963 and postponed college for a year to save money for tuition. In April 1964, I received my draft notice before I decided to apply to a college. After basic training at Ft. Knox, KY, and OJT in the 3/6th Field Artillery at Ft. Chafee, AR, I settled in for my two years of service as a 13E20 in the Fire Direction Center of an artillery battalion. I was trained to mimic a computer with a slide rule in the artillery before a real computer system was developed. Fort Chaffee was shut down, and my artillery unit moved to Ft. Sill, OK. I settled in with the buffalo, red dirt, Lone Star beer, and Native Americans to complete my tour. Vietnam was a country unknown to me.

In 1965, Vietnam became a new buzzword around Fort Sill. I had nine months remaining and thought I would stay in Oklahoma. One day, I noticed activity around the 2/17th Field Artillery, which was located near my unit. A fence was being installed surrounding the perimeter. The unit was short of critical personnel. I was transferred to the FDC section of C Battery 2/17th and informed that anyone with 30 days of service left was traveling to California by train to board the Troopship USS Gordon en route to Vietnam. I spent 17 days with 5,000 fellow troopers on this cruise. My time was spent washing pots and pans in the galley on the second shift. We fed 24 hours each day. I arrived at Quin Nhon on September 7, 1965; we used landing nets to board a Landing Craft for the beach landing. Kids were trying to sell bottles of Coke and bananas as we arrived. We were transported by truck inland to An Khe, which had a basic airfield in place for our first day In Country. We were now part of the 1st Cavalry Airmobile. The base camp Radcliffe was in a preliminary construction phase.

The arriving units were clearing the base camp primarily by hand. Thousands of Vietnamese laborers were employed. Our unit had older 105mm howitzers from Korea, stripped of all armor to barely fit into the Chinook helicopters for transport to fire bases. Slinging them under the Chinook was being developed. We traveled by air, truck, and LST, supporting the 1st Cavalry in the field. I then noticed the beauty of the countryside. We were in the mountainous central highlands. Rt. 1 and Rt. 19 were major highways from where we often fired missions for the Cavalry but spent plenty of missions dropped off in the jungle by helicopter.

The scenery changed day by day. The spraying of Agent Orange and other defoliants transformed areas into dead zones. People and crops, as well as our soldiers, were being affected by the chemical. My job was to stick a pin in a map and calculate firing data for the howitzers. The infantry around our perimeter always protected me. I could not see the impact of the artillery rounds fired at the enemy or see the deadly results as I was usually 3 to 7 kilometers from the impact zone. I would wonder how the enemy soldiers could survive the tremendous firepower (artillery, rockets, bombs) we threw at them. Collateral damage also bothered me.

We would provide replacement funds for water buffalo killed by friendly fire, but civilian casualties were a different story. Civilians in the wrong place in a battle became collateral damage, and you had to try to put this out of your mind. You were protecting your buddies and trying to save their lives. The battle of the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965 provided many days of concern for everyone's safety, as well as my own. When the 2/7th Cav walked into an ambush and suffered 155 KIAs at LZ Albany, I really became worried. They had walked between the NVA and our firebase. The next day, we were airlifted out of LZ Columbus to support the Vietnamese Rangers. LZ Columbus was attacked, and our replacement artillery battery suffered casualties. This campaign showed the random fate of war. My unit survived two close calls of major casualties.

This brings me to the main reason for my opinions of the Vietnam War. How could I justify my participation in the war? I returned to civilian life in April 1966 and quickly returned to my job and life before my draft in 1964. I began working at Argonne National Laboratory in 1996 and spent 44 years there before retiring in 2013. I married my wife, Carol, in 1973.

I tried forgetting Vietnam. I tried to join the VFW but left quickly, feeling unwelcome. Most of my friends never asked about my service. I didn't revive Vietnam until 1999. I contacted another artillery vet online, and we eventually formed our unit's reunion at Fort Sill. I dug out hundreds of slides and pictures of my tour and started reliving my nine months In Country. The pictures of the drastic changes to the landscape and some people showed me what the war had done to Vietnam.

I had little contact with the Vietnamese people except for three days during my R&R in Nha Trang. My unit spent most of its time in the field. I began volunteering at the Chicago Homeless Veterans Standdown in 2011. I helped provide breakfast and lunch to hundreds of vets twice a year. I met VVAW members Bill Branson and Barry Romo at these Standdowns. They worked in the kitchen, and a job I was familiar with was pots and pans. I always looked forward to my twice-a-year meeting with these comrades. This led to my joining VVAW.

I have only attended one event in Chicago, but I have always waited for their newsletter, *The Veteran*. In 2022, I first donated to VVAW's library project and became interested in the Library of Vietnam Project. The concept of repaying the people of Vietnam could not be accomplished more meaningfully. I learned from Chuck Theusch that a library project in the Bong Son area was possible. The 2/17th had supported the Cav at Bong Son before the end of my tour. The village was below our firebase. I knew I had found my solution to help the Vietnamese people. Their future is educating young people, and I had the funds to build a library. Chuck and Khoi helped with the paperwork, and I am now awaiting its construction. I can only hope this project will replace my negative thoughts about my participation in the Vietnam War.

John (Jack) Picciolo, C Battery, 2nd 17th Field Artillery, Drafted 1964-66. Supported 1st Cavalry Division, An Khe, Central Highlands September 1965-April 1966.

Meg Miner at Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

VVAW Library Project Updates

The third VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam under constructiom at An Nghia Secondary School, August 9, 2024.

Newly painted murals at the third VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam at An Nghia Secondary School, September 15, 2024.

First day of classes at the second VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam at Hanh Trung Primary School, September 6, 2024.

First day of classes at the second VVAW Library and Learning Center in Vietnam at Hanh Trung Primary School, September 6, 2024.

THE VETERAN

SECTION B

Volume 54, Number 2 Fall 2024

History in the Making

Robert Maury

Stateville's Veterans Group secured its place in history when it kicked off Remembrance and Rights, its Memorial Day program honoring our nation's fallen service members and observing the 157th year since the first commemoration in 1868—a few years after the end of the Civil War and slavery in the United States.

From the"Posting of Colors," the presentations and placement of our nation's flag at the beginning of public ceremonies, to the "retrieval of colors," the removal of our nation's flag at the end of the ceremony, the program was full of firsts. This was the first time in the history of Stateville Prison, if not the first time in the history of the state of Illinois, that incarcerated veterans were allowed to organize their ceremony in a maximum security state prison.

This event was also the first time that, while remembering our nation's fallen, the Stateville Veterans Group spoke out for universal voting rights, specifically the enfranchisement of incarcerated veterans and civilians alike. Pushing forward the battle for voting rights in State and Federal elections, the group spoke in support of the RACE ACT (The Reintegration and Civic Empowerment ACT), also known as Illinois Senate Bill 3482. Powerful proponents joined the veterans, including the Civil Rights group Chicago Votes, while Doctor Christina Rivers of Depaul University gave a keynote address on the history of African-Americans' fight for voting rights from the end of slavery through Black Reconstruction (1865-1877) and beyond.

The aspirations of the program were perfectly realized. We planned to draw a throughline between the history of Memorial Day, the historic fight against slavery, the struggle for voting rights, the ongoing movement for freedom, and the history-making performance of the Stateville Veterans Group during their Memorial Day program. Through this confluence of American history, we remember our fallen and state our claim on the future.

Afterword
by Aaron Hughes

Before the Memorial Day program, on March 15, 2024, Illinois Gov. Pritzker announced the closure of Stateville Prison. This was not the first time the old prison was slated to be closed. Past efforts had been delayed by lawsuits and contract negotiations such that the Memorial Day program was planned to plant seeds and establish an outline for future veteran-initiated programs at the prison.

However, after several incidents over the summer, including the death of Michael Broadway, one of the people imprisoned at Stateville who attended the Memorial Day program just weeks before his demise, authorities began moving quickly to transfer people and close the prison. As a result, the Stateville Veterans Group has been dismantled.

Likewise, the people who made up the abolitionist community in the prison were split up and sent to different prisons across the state. In Illinois and nationally, this community of scholars, artists, and activists inside the prison was essential to promoting liberatory education and many prison reforms and decarcerate efforts over the past decade. Although this group and many of us involved with them have advocated for the decrepit prison's closure for years, Sarah Ross, the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project's founder, asked, "Is it always abolitionist to close a prison?"

Robert Maury speaking at the Stateville Veterans Group's Remembrance and Rights, 2024 Memorial Day program.

Of course, with the hope that closing a prison means more people get to go home, the answer is yes. Yet, when the state utilizes the closing not to release people but to dismantle the community at the heart of the abolitionist movement in Illinois while planning to spend 900 million dollars to build a new prison, perhaps it is less clear.

Let us hope, like seeds blowing in the wind, that the closing of Stateville and the disbanding of the community there only results in the sowing of new veterans groups working for universal rights and the sprouting of new radical abolitionist communities across the state. Let's push the Governor to take action, sign clemencies, and pass decarceration reforms that result in our friends and family members coming home.

Robert Maury is a Navy veteran who served in the 7th Fleet from 1975 to 1977. He was the Stateville Veterans Group Sergeant in Arms until he was transferred in the lead-up to the closing of prison this year.

Aaron Hughes is an Iraq War veteran and member of About Face: Veterans Against the War. He is an organizer for the Veteran Art Movement. For the past year, he facilitated meetings for the Stateville Veterans Group. Since 2016, he has facilitated and taught classes with the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project at Stateville Prison.

Stateville Veteran Group at their Remembrance and Rights, 2024 Memorial Day program.

I am a Veteran, and I am…

I am a veteran— a United States Marine…
And I am a convicted felon.
I am a patriot… and I am an outlaw.
I am an honored son… I am a social pariah.
Filled with pride… filled with shame.
Celebrated… reviled.
Held in esteem… held in a cell.

— *Ben Meyer*

Ben Meyer is a Marine Corps veteran imprisoned in Illinois. He was an active member of the Stateville Veteran Group until he was transferred in the lead up to the closing of prison this year.

Dominic Albanese: War Vet, Wild Man, Poet

Jan Barry

Fifty years ago
To the minute
... a sound
(I could hear quite well then)
like a soda can pop top
my cells knew
I leaped up as if I were spring loaded
the grenade exploded
...
yet, the exhilaration, escape, defiance of death
Was nectar, food for my later madness

This is the kind of kick-ass poetry Dominic Albanese worked for decades to write. But when he got home from a Special Forces tour as a teenager chasing danger in Vietnam, a lifetime of distractions kept getting in the way: joyriding on motorcycles, running illegal drugs, getting addicted to illicit drugs, protesting the war with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, chasing women and more women, raising a daughter, doing fine-tune mechanic jobs on expensive sports cars and hot stolen cars, staging robberies, enduring a stint in Folsom Prison, then a long rehabilitation with AA and CA and church folks and caring friends. Now, he's a retiree in Florida, writing his recollections in poetry collections and memoirs.

The snippet of poetry above is excerpted from "April 17, 1964," published in *Bastards Had the Whole Hill Mined: Vietnam Poems* (Les Editions du Zaporogue, 2015). These war poems describe being dropped into Southeast Asian jungles on long-range patrols: "down the trail/ comes Charlie, with bags o rice/ bamboo medical supplies ammo/ wrapped in banana leaf packs/ wearing the brown hats/ with the little yellow star…" Then he cuts through what he calls the "ra ra bullshit" of war stories. "Well you have never seen/ four guys/ lie so still, so quiet so scared/ never to admit it in public".

He also takes readers into a back alley in Saigon to share beer and reefer with a "black hair charm woman," who tells a young soldier his fortune: "she smiled/ I can remember it like two days ago/ in Cham a lost tongue I had never heard before/ but instantly knew/ it was not a spell or a curse/ it was a sad and old/ sin loi sou di duc du kei/ (you will not die only suffer for years to come)/ now again fifty years later/ I wonder how she knew."

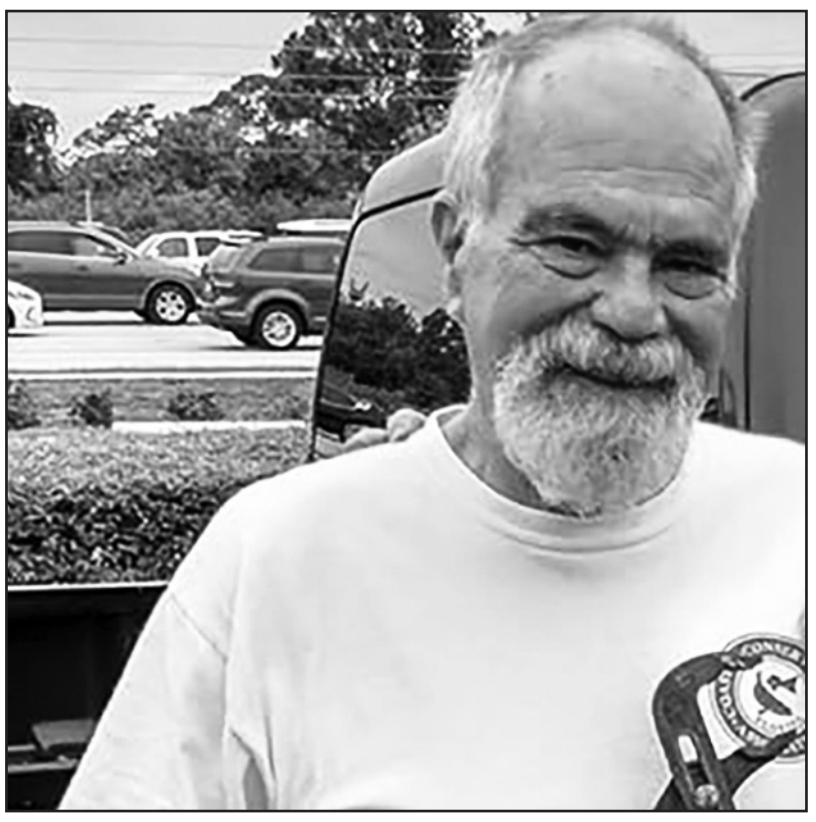
In a companion poetry collection, *Then N Now*, published in 2015, Albanese notes that poetry helped keep him going through self-destructive times, hanging out between escapades with New York poets at the St. Marks Poetry Project and San Francisco poets of the Beat generation. "Other than having written poetry for decades," he writes, "I have no further training in poetry—other than a deep and real trust in the healing nature of it, and the absolute pleasure it gave me to knock one out of the park."

Among the most astute poems in this collection is "Departed But Not Gone."

this morning
between dark to dawn
I saw a man
pushing an
empty wheel chair
causeway side walk
both side river view
it hit me
She was gone
he walked the
chair without her
not wanting her ghost
to miss
days attendance sun rise
over barrier island mangrove banks

A junior high school-dropout from Coney Island who got a GED in the Army, Albanese prides himself on writing poems in ungrammatical Brooklynese. In a memoir titled *Dear Miss B*, he writes more studiously in homage to his 7th-grade English teacher who encouraged him as a flailing student hustling odd jobs and stealing cars on the side. Escaping jail time by joining the Army, after his father and a priest lied about his age, he wrote letters to Miss B from Vietnam. Years later, the woman's daughter tracked him down on social media to share that his favorite teacher had died and mailed him a boxful of the wartime letters she had kept.

Using the recovered letters as memory aids, Albanese unravels the convoluted story of how a wise-guy kid who couldn't sit still in grade school ended up as a Vietnamese-speaking communications specialist on Special Forces missions in Vietnam and Laos. "My first patrol up in the hills," he wrote in an early letter, "hard to even say, how not only is it hard to pass thru the jungle, but when ya do get on the hill side, the rocks, sometimes fall, and you gotta be very careful how you move…So far it is more like some movie than it is a real war, but, bugs, snakes, birds who are loud, and monkeys who make more noise than you ever heard, one of the Yards [GI slang for Montagnards] told me when the birds and monkey are quiet you got a big problem…"



More than a year later, in March 1965, he wrote Miss B: "I am going back to Okinawa, and with just some good moves, I can stay there, or come back to CONUS, and be, outta all this madness." Pushing the boundaries on what could be put in a letter from the war zone, he adds: "I will tell you the whole mood has changed here, more guys getting killed, and way more ambushes, outright camp overruns, and this is now, really starting to look like a war."

Getting out of the Army in March 1966 with several thousand dollars, "a few ounces of Cambodian Red Weed, a .45 pistol, two sets of civilian clothes, and a sale brochure for Harley motorcycles," Albanese set out from California to New York aiming for a life of adventure. As recounted in a recent memoir titled *101 Elsie St* (Poetic Justice Books, 2023), his first civilian job was hauling kilos of marijuana in a VW van from Arizona to sell to mob connections in Coney Island. Amid cross-country drug mule treks, he spent some time hanging out with a girlfriend in New York's East Village, where in the summer of 1967, he hooked up with some other angry vets to help launch Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

I remember Dom as exceedingly bitter, haranguing me to make harsher statements than I felt comfortable with in my fledgling public speaking role as a VVAW organizer. I don't recall us talking about poetry, although I also dropped by poetry events at St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, an East Village institution.

And then, like many vets who helped get a radical anti-war veterans' group off the ground, Dominic Albanese disappeared. Decades later, he popped up on Facebook, interacting with vet poets and posting firecracker bursts of short poems. One day, he wrote that he needed money to pay some bills and was selling copies of his books at a discount. Turns out he's the author of over a dozen collections of poetry and two memoirs. Many of his books are listed on Amazon and lulu.com.

In his book description on Amazon for a 2019 poetry collection titled *Disconnected Memories*, he notes: "I have been writing poetry since I was twelve years old, and within sight of where I am sitting at the moment are more than seventy-five notebooks full of poems. When I returned to the United States from Vietnam in March of 1966 I spent at least fifteen years—in the words of Bryon—being 'mad and bad and dangerous to know'. I suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a malady that could not then be named—for a few years I had an almost terminal case of it. Crime, drugs, chopped reality, fast motorcycles, women, rum and cocaine, all of these just about killed me. I went to prison for a while. Through all of that I never stopped writing poetry, even if some of my poems from those times are as dreadful as the years themselves were."

Jan Barry is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.

The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise: Pentimento Memories of Mom and Me
by Robert W. Norris
(Tin Gate, 2023)

Some time ago, I received an email from Robert W. Norris asking if I would review his book for *The Veteran*. Of course, I said yes. I was intrigued because the author lives in Japan, and his story includes declaring himself a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and going to prison.

My Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines pentimento as referring to penitence, or regrets or sorrow for sins or faults, but more specifically (and mysteriously) as a reappearance in a painting of a design that has been painted over.

I'm retired and read as many books as I can cram into my schedule. I have a stack of more than forty I am looking forward to reading, and more and more keep coming along. I have a T-shirt that reads: "one does not stop buying books because there is no more shelf space." I've grown impatient in my reading. All too often, I lose interest in a book by about 100 pages. I set them aside and never regain enough interest to go back to them. Similarly, I wander through an art museum and contemplate one painting, but I walk right past another that just doesn't appeal to me. I fully appreciate the time and stress the painter or author has devoted to his work, but sometimes, it doesn't register with me.

*The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Ris*e is 469 pages long. I admit, I didn't read them all. Tin Page Books, the British publisher, is located in England and offers services for the author who wishes to self-publish but is unfamiliar with publishing. I must admit, they have put together a handsome package, inside and out. There are lots of photographs and endorsements from a number of writers, including VVAW member Michael Uhl and Rosa del Duca, author of *Breaking Cadence*, which I recently reviewed. Rosa describes *The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise* as "a wide-ranging, fascinating ramble of a tale," and Michael as a "bumpy coming-of-age tale," and "a narrative style that is both graceful and seamless."

The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise is a loving tribute to the author's mother, and he convinces the reader that she was an amazing and wonderful woman. After sincerely trying to read it, my impression is that an editor in a conventional publishing house would have trimmed the story down to about 150 pages. The book is far too "wide-ranging," and the narrative style is much too bloated with meaningless details. Asked if he had the time, I suggest Mr. Norris would tell you how to build an eight-day clock. I opened the book expecting to read every word, and in no time, I was drowning in an ocean of unnecessary bloat. I found that reading this book was a chore, and I began to search for meaningful parts. Obviously, Tin Gate Books did not edit this "fascinating ramble."

In chapter five, the author recalls "an early morning in the redwoods, fishing with Dad in the creek that flows near our property line. The sun is not yet over the ridge of high trees. The sound of the creek is enchanting. The chirping of robins and sparrows filters through the air and is swallowed by the forest. I feel a tug on my line and jerk my pole carefully. Dad is by my side, coaching me patiently and lauding my performance with a gentle word. This singular image elicits the consummate joy that is my childhood. In this childhood, there is nothing more mysterious, wonderful, and ominous than the forest. Our entire family life is surrounded, infused, and dominated by the existence of the forest."

I didn't find the narrative style "graceful and seamless." I found it thick and sticky as quicksand. Contemplating 469 pages wading through the author's literary quagmire, I put the book aside. Once in a while, I surrendered to my curiosity and read another portion, searching for the really important passages, especially the author's refusal to obey the Air Force's orders to report for assignment to Vietnam and the resulting (six months) prison sentence. True to form, he wraps his story in so many unnecessary words that the importance of the story is obscured.

I regret that I cannot be positive about *The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise*. Mr. Norris has lived a turbulent life, and the story's focus is his appreciation of his mother, who has loved and supported him through every bit of it, good or bad. It is a nice story that way, but I never found the purpose of using the word pentimento to describe the book. Mr. Norris's vocabulary is excellent, but his writing style is too complex for me. It's too bad Tin Gate Books doesn't have an editor.

JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW AND THE AUTHOR OF TWO CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED BOOKS ABOUT VIETNAM, ...AND A HARD RAIN FELL AND VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER.

26 August 71

Monday is my ETS.
55 years since
Private E-1 Levy,
one badge
five ribbons
five article 15s
two court-martials
5 days stockade
departed the Army
hitching a ride
from his court-martial
secretary, spending
the night with her,
next morning,
a bus to Boston.
55 years, Vietnam
never a day away.

—Marc Levy

Arachnid Blues

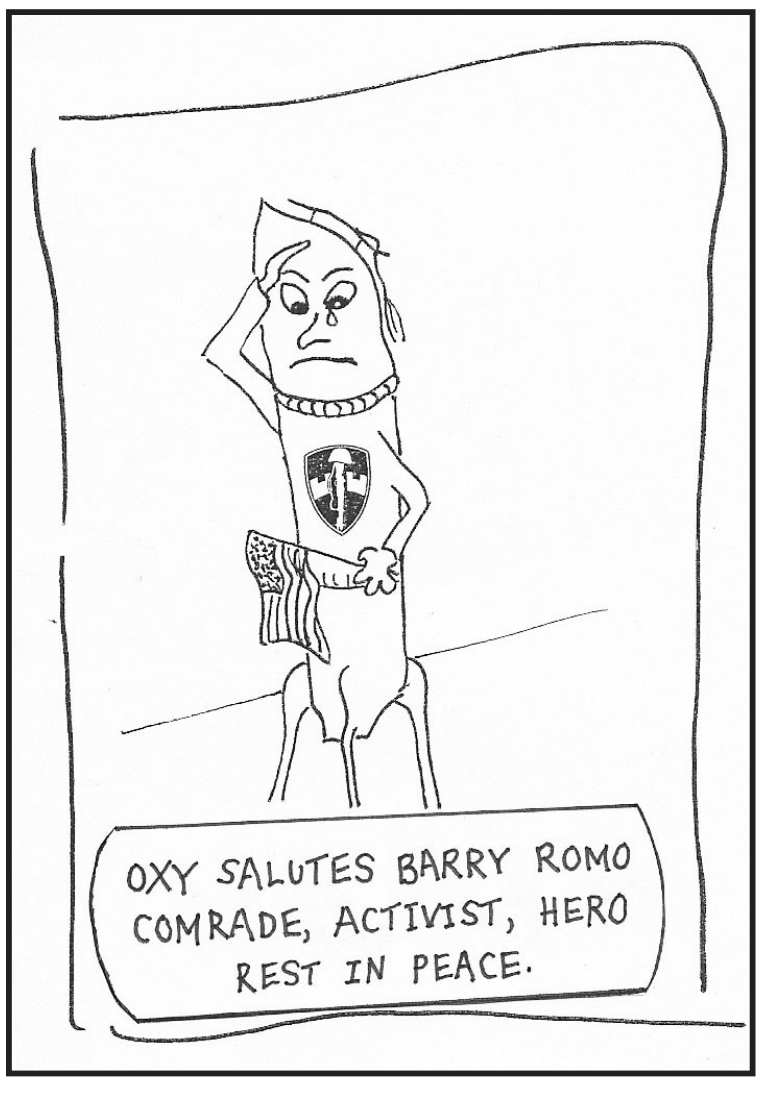
I.

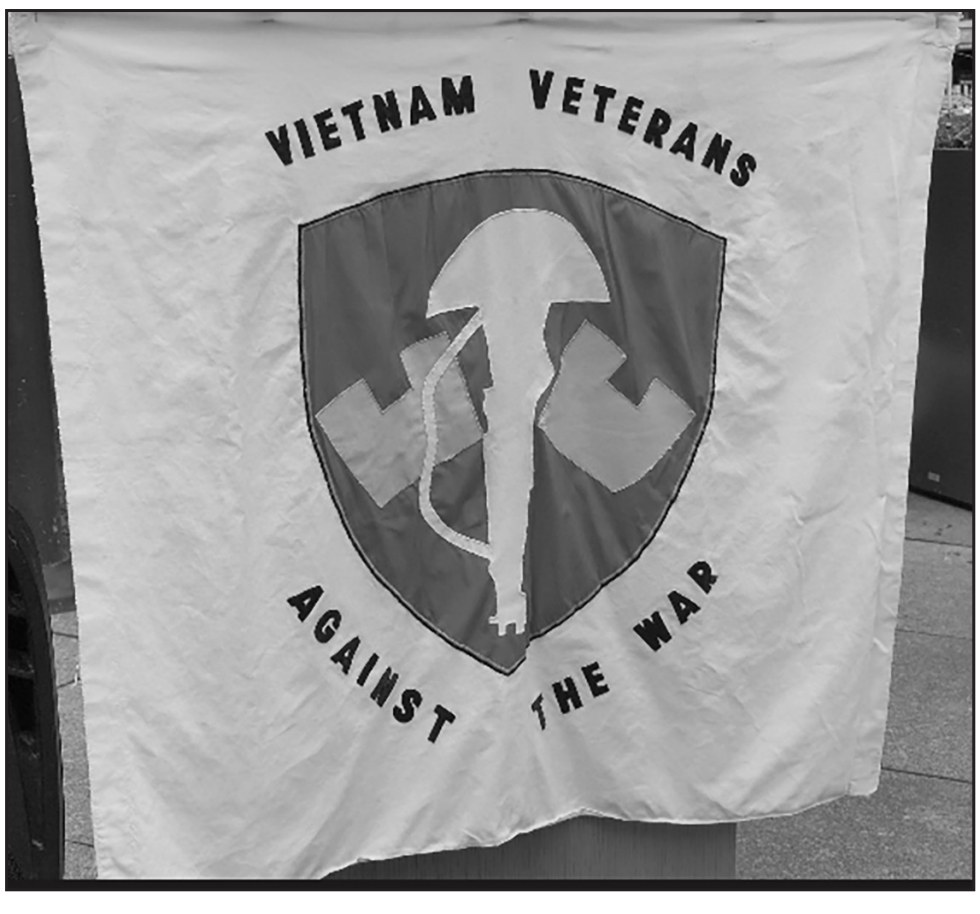
Fee, fie, fo, fum,
I got bit by a scorpion
not once, but twice.
It wasn't nice,
but I didn't die,
though I did cry
"Corpsman!"
loudly enough to convey
to every Viet Cong and NVA
from the DMZ to Hanoi
that I was a boy
in pain.

II.

Years later,
a scorpion walks into a bar
and orders a beer.
The bartender,
who happened to be an ex-Marine
who had once been bitten
by a scorpion
—twice—
grabbed an entrenching tool
from under the bar
and smashed the little bastard.

—W. D. Ehrhart





How Does One Fight for Peace?

Andy Berman (reviewer)

Fighting for Peace: A Vietnam-era Thriller
by Jim Perakis
(Fourth Wall, 2024)

Jim Perakis' new novel, *Fighting for Peace: A Vietnam-Era Thriller* presents an intriguing view of the developing anti-war consciousness of a US Navy combat veteran with whom today's veterans and civilian peace activists may feel kinship.

This novel is historical fiction. But since the history portrayed, i.e., the US war in Vietnam and the anti-war movement in the US, is relatively recent, the author is challenged by the fact that his reading audience includes veterans and anti-war activists during the times and events portrayed in the book. They will inevitably compare the people and events described in the book with those the reader knows from personal experience.

Many such readers will nod their heads, thinking, "Yes, I remember something like that." Others may think, "No way! That incident in the book is pure fantasy, very much at odds with what I remember."

The main character in the book is a US Navy junior officer, as is the book's author. This suggests that the author is telling a story with at least some basis in his experiences in the US Navy in 1967 and 1968. The protagonist in the book has been in combat and has shot down a Vietnamese fighter jet. After combat, he is having doubts about the US war in Vietnam.

Yes, having doubts fits the reality of the times and the experiences of many veterans. Back at the base, our hero develops a romantic relationship with a female pacifist anti-war activist and begins to work with her peace group. Again, this is a very believable development. I saw it happen at the Haymarket GI coffeehouse outside Fort Bragg in 1971.

There is frustration in our protagonist's anti-war group because the war continues on and on. Some members want to escalate tactics by setting off bombs, thinking that "bringing the war home" could stop the war. This argument was made e.g. by the SDS "Weather Underground" faction in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The main character of the book, our Navy veteran, breaks up with his pacifist lover and participates in placing bombs, always with the intent of destroying only property, trying carefully to avoid killing people.

When some in the group sought to drop that restriction, our Navy vet had had enough! He informs the FBI of an impending bombing that could kill many people. He cuts a deal to avoid prison for his bombing activities and quits the organization. He wanders the streets of lower Manhattan, lonely and depressed.

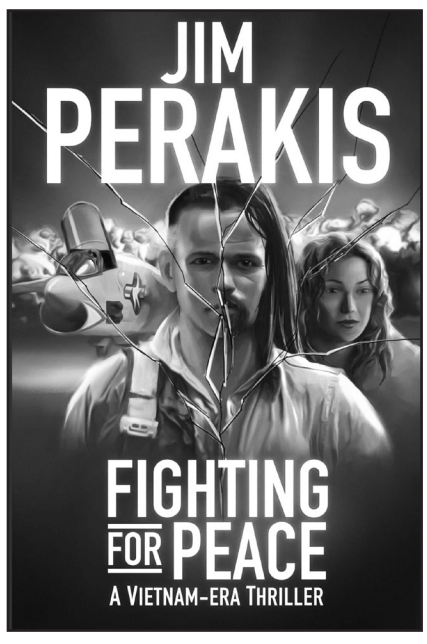
He ultimately gets involved in the militant, non-violent movement of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The story has a sweet ending. There is hope for reuniting with the woman who originally stole his heart and set him on the path of anti-war activism.

So, what's wrong here? It's an intense, highly readable, and ultimately sweet story, but not without its faults. How does the book's narrative depart from what really happened? Here are a few ways:

The real FBI worked hard to destroy the anti-war movement despite its overwhelming non-violent orientation. It didn't just go after those few who adopted violence as a tactic.

The book repeats the "Spitting Image" myth, the propaganda that says Vietnam vets returning from the war were spit upon by anti-war activists. This myth was created and disseminated in Hollywood films as a means to justify the US Gulf War of 1990. Its origin and use are well-researched and exposed in Sociology Professor Jerry Lembcke's book *Spitting Image*. As serious Vietnam anti-war activists know, Vietnam veterans were viewed by the peace movement as victims of the war. They were understood to be the peace movement's natural allies despite the pressure and confusion that sometimes afflicted vets upon their return to the States.

The move to violence by a tiny



number of anti-war activists was shunned and rejected by the overall peace community. This is examined and documented in several books, notably those of former SDS activists. Mark Rudd's book *Underground* is perhaps the best.

Yet despite its faults, reading *Fighting for Peace* is a joy. Readers who lived during the Vietnam War era should not hesitate to compare their knowledge and experiences with those of the veterans and civilian characters in the book. Doing so is probably inevitable.

Andy Berman, US Army 1971-73, is a retired telecommunications engineer and lifelong peace and justice activist. He blogs at andyberman.blogspot.com

Into The Quagmire

John Crandell (reviewer)

Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles
by William Prochnau
(Crown, 1995)

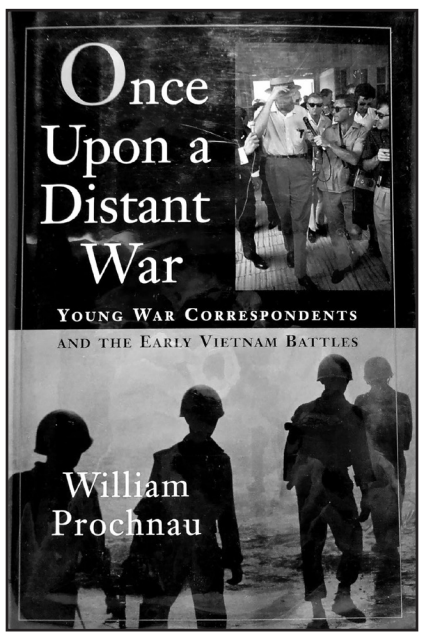
All of the wretched tragedy that was to come was foretold by western journalists in a delectable, Boomer oriented era of joy and consumption, before Diem and Kennedy were shot twenty one days apart in one month of autumn. Ironically, the author of the subject of this review was yet to arrive in 'Nam for the first of two tours reporting for the *Washington Post*. The Beach Boys' 'Surfin' USA' had been the number one hit of 1963. Years hence the The Animals' 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place' became the favored song by Vietnam vets (eventually, Jeff Buckley's 'Once I Was' would come to haunt so many strung-out members of said Boomer generation). In-country, over three years remained until the arrival of journalist Michael Herr who eventually would pen his memoir titled *Dispatches*, that which novelist John le Carré assayed as "the best book I have ever read on men and war in our time." Prochnau's and Herr's works remain as two exceedingly rich companions. It has been three decades now since the former produced the most engaging volume of all the literature of the early US effort in preventing Ho Chi Minh from winning at Dominoes.

Adjectives such as intriguing, alluring and even romantic can also apply to what is Prochnau's foremost work published by Times Books in 1995. The work remains available via Amazon for nineteen bucks. His research included ninety interviews and an impressive array of sources rendered narratively for each of eighteen chapters plus a bibliography of periodical and broadcast elements.

Prochnau's magnetic work is the one book of the Vietnam war which I've returned to repeatedly, been enraptured by an author who was not present to witness the place and time which he examines—journalists and national media while JFK was alive and in the White House. Peter Osnos, our present day expert on the war edited the work. Reporters for agencies such as *Time, Newsweek, Associated Press, United Press International* and the *New York Times* are lionized for their efforts to break through to reality, shatter the force of Washington's and mass media's nationalistic ship of state. Those individuals were Charlie Mohr, Francois Sully, Stanley Karnow, Malcom Browne, Peter Arnett, Ray Herndon, Mert Perry, Keyes Beech, Homer Bigart, Pam Sanders and especially the duo of Neil Sheehan and David Halberstam. The script also includes old guard/rear guard bad boys such as journalism's Richard Tregaskis, Joseph Alsop and Ernest Hoberect. And then there was Westmoreland's self deluded predecessor, Paul Harkins—likely the nation's worst ever commander stonewalling at the American embassy. The notoriety of Sheehan and Halberstam in America soon resulted in the arrival of one "fire eating, Commie hating" reportorial queen of the Korean war named Marguerite Higgins. She with Halberstam's forehead targeted in her eyes. Both the brother and sister in law of the South Vietnam's president had no restraint in their capacity for evil. Various ethnic and religious sects banged their drums; all elements combined and Saigon's environment boiled amidst the sweet and sour pulp of Tamarind.

Could a book regarding journalists at the very apex of their lives in a leavening exotic locale be translated, become the greatest film of the United States' experience in Vietnam? One such effort could unwind, delve into a society's mandate to conform for the preservation of status. That, added to human capacity for self deception in a democratic realm—a nation's primary bedrock operative long ago became a political necessity. A bit of perspective: in his sprawling, highly lauded *Vietnam: A History*, Stanley Karnow would include only two short paragraphs in his work reducing the wide scope, prepossessing array of journalistic efforts revealed by Prochnau's intoxicating, alluring, street-level immediacy. Karnow's vast perspective is rendered from one very high atmospheric balloon.

I write this on August 9th, the little-noted 50th anniversary of Dick Nixon's disgraceful exit from the White House. CIA operative Lucien Conein had nearly got himself included amongst Tricky's Plumbers earlier arrested at the Watergate, a full decade after Sheehan began calling him "Three Fingered Mordecai'"due to his activities in Saigon. No other American cast more intrigue instigating a coup d'état which instead became a coup de grâce, therein failed to prevent the deaths of Diem and brother Nhu eighteen months before



any American combat personnel arrived.

As we all came to learn, profits were being made off of the Black Market—from Ca Mau Province north to the DMZ. Eventually I would come into conflict with certain personnel assigned to the 4th Division Post Exchange. Certain transactors were under suspicion and one sergeant's number popped up at my APO window. With the assassination in November of '63, a wide, well-lubricated runway opened up for Lyndon's White Market, way back home in Texas. He and Lady Bird would soon back their truck up to the loading dock in their associating and investing activities. By that point in time, astute reporting by a very independent cast of journalists had revealed a story of one great ship of state having already sailed into a steamed morass of human nature. All of the horror and tumult for America yet remained. William Prochnau's tome presents a grand, unmatched view of national self delusion.

John Crandell, a one-time insubordinate postal clerk for the 4th US infantry, is now retired from Beale AFB, propagates large-sized exotic succulents, and has nightmares regarding Donald Trump.

Hell, No, We Didn't Go!

GERALD R. GIOGLIO (REVIEWER)

Hell, No, We Didn't Go! Firsthand Accounts of Vietnam War Protest and Resistance
by Eli Greenbaum
(University Press of Kansas, 2024)

"Once the possibility of being drafted entered our brains, it burrowed in, made itself comfortable, and disturbed our thinking and behavior."

With these introductory words, Eli Greenbaum begins his important and very fine piece of work. The author, keeping an eye clearly focused on the civilian resistance, explains, "People's lives were dramatically changed on the battlefields of Vietnam…and in this war, lives were also considerably changed in draft board offices across the country."

Right, those of us who were in the military tend to dwell on those complicated, sometimes horrific days, especially those who spent time in Vietnam or prison. But what of the run-up to becoming a member of the military?

This book will bring you back to those difficult days when, for better or worse, the choices we would make dramatically changed our futures. Trust me; it will help you see the things you have done in life and those you failed to do in a completely new light. Expect to identify with some of the stories. The ones closest to your experience may bring a tear to your eye, expect that some may piss you off due to the inequity of the system, but most of all, expect many of these tales to help you understand just what the Hell happened to our generation.

The book is part memoir and part oral history. It features powerful first-hand accounts told in compelling personal vignettes from several men who came up against the Selective Service System during the Vietnam era.

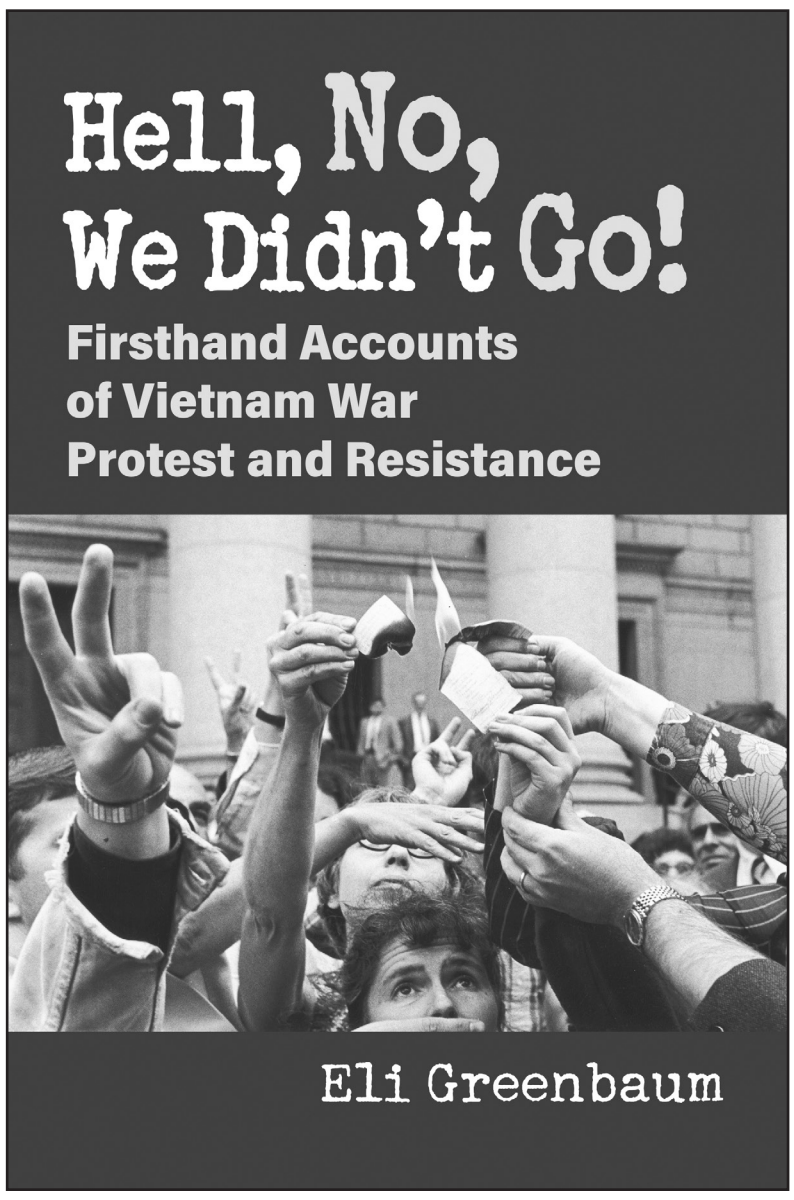
The interviewees include several the author met in and around Detroit, Michigan. He was referred to others and soon found that potential interviewees contacted him to share their Selective Service stories. The author reports that the men discuss how they "avoided, evaded, and resisted" the draft.

As a former draft counselor, I have to say that virtually every situation a young man could confront while dealing with the draft is covered in these pages. Some folks legitimately qualified for various exemptions, others were refugees who left the country, kids who went underground, absolute resisters who went to prison based on their beliefs, guys who enlisted in the National Guard or active duty on the promise of getting a better deal from recruiters, middle and upper-middle-class kids, with and without connections, who got sympathetic doctors to fudge letters for them, and my favorites both in the military and among the civilian resistance, Conscientious Objectors. The author admits that finding and getting cooperation from people of color proved problematic and is the only shortcoming in this otherwise stellar presentation.

The book consists of an Introduction and three Chapters that detail the author's confrontation with his local draft board and provide comprehensive information on Selective Service law and its workings. The following eleven chapters are from folks who agreed to share their stories. Here are personal accounts from now mostly retired men that vividly describe their youthful thinking and fears. Tales told with honesty and passion, recalling the events of the 1960s as if they were discussed yesterday. Many of these interviewees then performed a lifetime of civilian service in non-military jobs such as teaching or mental or physical health. Several continued their peace activism. For this, we can truly say, "Thank you for your service."

The author ends the book by presenting various Selective Service System data, includes a helpful Bibliography, and offers suggestions for further reference. Most importantly, he treats us to his perspective, giving an excellent review of the effects of the draft on the personal lives of young men and how all those doubts and worries could be dismissed in response to a national call to service in a just war. Greenbaum poses questions that many in his book struggled with, "when do we have the option to refuse…more …when do we have an obligation to refuse?" He concludes, "We believe—and still do…It was our duty to refuse."

Sure, that pre-military experience may have taken second place in the minds of most of us who were drafted or enlisted. But I am suggesting this part of the story needs to be told—not only to help us come to grips with it but to correct the historical record and to be made available to those young men and women who may someday be caught up in conscription should that system ever again raise its ugly head.

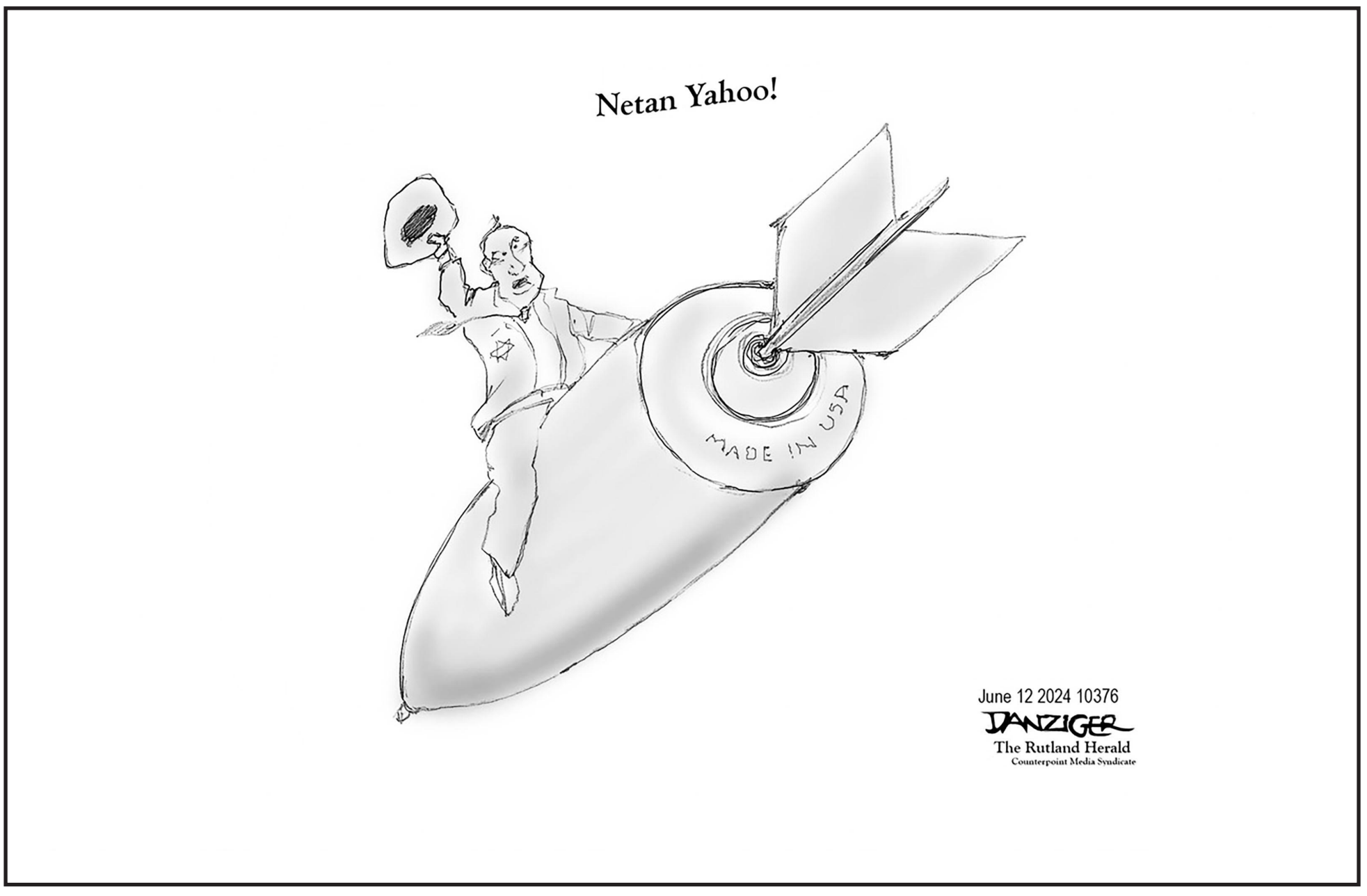


This reviewer understands that many VVAW members are now purging libraries and are not buying as many books as in the past. But no excuses, *Hell, No, We Didn't Go!* is also available as a Kindle e-book. Either way, I encourage you to get a copy of Eli Greenbaum's work. It will take you back to a distressing time before your military experience, to the days when you and the women you loved were on tenterhooks, wondering just how you should confront the prospect of being drafted. You will see yourself in several of the stories. You will be moved, and you will be reassured that our actions as civilians, as in-service war resisters, and as anti-war veterans were the right thing to do. And, you will be convinced that most confrontations with the draft discussed by these men were also part of the patriotic resistance to that bloody, murderous war.

In this book, Eli Greenbaum captures the story of the past, which most males of our generation would like to forget. But thankfully, this important book keeps the story alive, one that documents the perseverance and patriotism of those civilians who—whether they realized it or not at the time—stood up to the system and screamed Hell No! By quoting Martin Luther King, I humbly suggest that if "the arc of the moral universe is long, but bends toward justice," then the men in Eli Greenbaum's book joined us in being "the benders."

Finally, consider this. The Vietnam War is as far away from Generation Z as World War I was to us. So, consider keeping this story alive by gifting copies to your grandchildren… to inform them, prepare them, and keep them on guard.

GERALD R. GIOGLIO IS A MEMBER OF VVAW AND THE AUTHOR OF MARCHING TO A SILENT TUNE: A JOURNEY FROM WE SHALL TO HELL NO (2022) AND DAYS OF DECISION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN THE MILITARY DURING THE VIETNAM WAR (1989).



Prisoners After War

John Ketwig (reviewer)

Prisoners after War: Veterans in the Age of Mass Incarceration
by Jason A. Higgins
(University of Massachusetts Press, 2024)

Jason A. Higgins is the digital scholarship coordinator for Virginia Tech Publishing and an assistant professor jointly affiliated with Virginia Tech University Libraries and the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. He is the co-editor of *Service Denied: Marginalized Veterans in Modern American History*. I must disclose that I have had dinner with Jason and spoke to one of his classes.

I look forward to addressing other Virginia Tech classes in the future.

Prisoners After War is a bit of a play on words evolved from the common phrase Prisoners of War. Most Vietnam veterans are aware that far too many of our fellows are or have been incarcerated since returning from the War. Higgins begins by stating that veterans' "ability to readjust after War also depends on social, historical, and cultural context, which are often determined by race, gender, and legal status. The central research question that guides this project asks: What is the relationship between military-related trauma, discrimination, and incarceration?" In 1990, he points out, nearly 1,150,000 Americans were incarcerated, and that number swelled to nearly 2 million by the end of the decade. And, even though African Americans were only 12.9 percent of the total US population, nearly half of the people in prison were Black.

America's total prison population swelled from 200,000 in 1970 to 7.1 million in 2010. Despite criminal justice reforms, there were still 1.8 million Americans incarcerated in 2021, with 6.9 million booked and housed in jails without yet being convicted. With nearly 4 million on parole and millions more struggling to have a life after being incarcerated, "carceral punishment has become a way of life in the United States."

Higgins points out the impact that poor morale throughout the military had upon the futures of veterans. When Richard Nixon became president, the military had issued only a couple hundred undesirable discharges per year, but those "bad paper" discharges multiplied exponentially, from 6,911 in 1970 to more than 12,000 in 1971 and more than 25,000 in 1972. Of course, during those years, the military was confronted with a concentrated Black resistance movement, the GI anti-war movement (VVAW), and the debilitating realization that increasing numbers of GIs were rebellious, going AWOL, deserting, even mutinous.

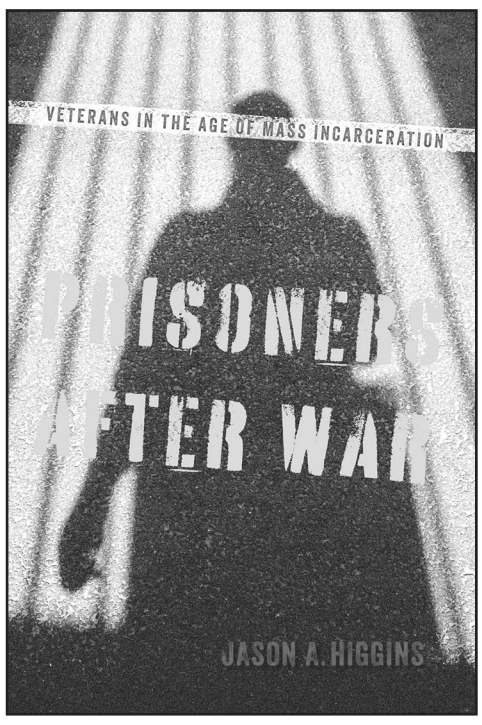
Vets with other-than-honorable discharges were subject to lifetime consequences, such as being ineligible for veterans' benefits, entitlements, financial assistance, and VA health care. It wasn't until 2014 that the federal government recognized these problems and initiated reforms encouraging "liberal consideration" for "bad paper" veterans.

Prisoners After War paints a very troubling portrait of America since the JFK assassination, the single most outrageous incident of the struggle, which was conducted primarily by aging white men and the American society's elites, to counter the idealism and constitutional awareness of the various irreverent movements of the era. A lot of Americans were tried, convicted, and jailed, and a very significant percentage of them were veterans.

It must be noted, and *Prisoners After War* does an excellent job of it, that more modern-day veterans returned from Iraq or Afghanistan have been subjected to even more intense pressures and even more harsh judicial punishments. "Despite more progressive attitudes in the Army on PTSD, TBI, and depression, the military continues to punish those with mental health and behavioral problems, especially for first-time drug use."

"The US Army takes great pride in its policies of punishing members for drug use, framing the increase in administrative separations as progress and improving mission readiness. But from a different perspective, punitive policies for substance abuse disorder are draconian and regressive. Rather than providing treatment, the military kicks out personnel with mental health, substance use disorders, or behavioral problems that often result from fighting in the Global War on Terrorism. One study of VA health records showed that among 206,000 veterans, one-third were diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder, and 41 percent were diagnosed with a mental health disorder, including depression, or a behavioral adjustment disorder. In the first ten years after 9/11, misconduct separations accounted for a vast number of the Army's nearly 180,000 administrative discharges. As double punishment, former service members with misconduct discharges are usually denied access to VA benefits, disability rights, and health care. It costs less money and takes less time to discharge soldiers with behavioral issues than to treat their underlying mental health problems."

Author Jason Higgins interviewed many vets whose lives have been severely impacted by all this, and he does a skillful job of integrating



the histories of their heart-breaking struggles along with a shocking, illuminating history of efforts by society's elites to preserve and protect their obscene wealth and authority. *Prisoners After War* is an important book illuminating some dark corners of American history. It is not an entertaining book, but one that exposes many outrageous and significant truths about America's mistreatment of its veterans. The writing is clear and convincing, the subject is troubling, the author's findings are well documented, and the book is highly recommended.

"Be all you can be" indeed!

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW and the author of two critically-acclaimed books about Vietnam, ...and a hard rain fell: A GI's True Story of the Vietnam War and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter.

Allow Prisoners A Voice

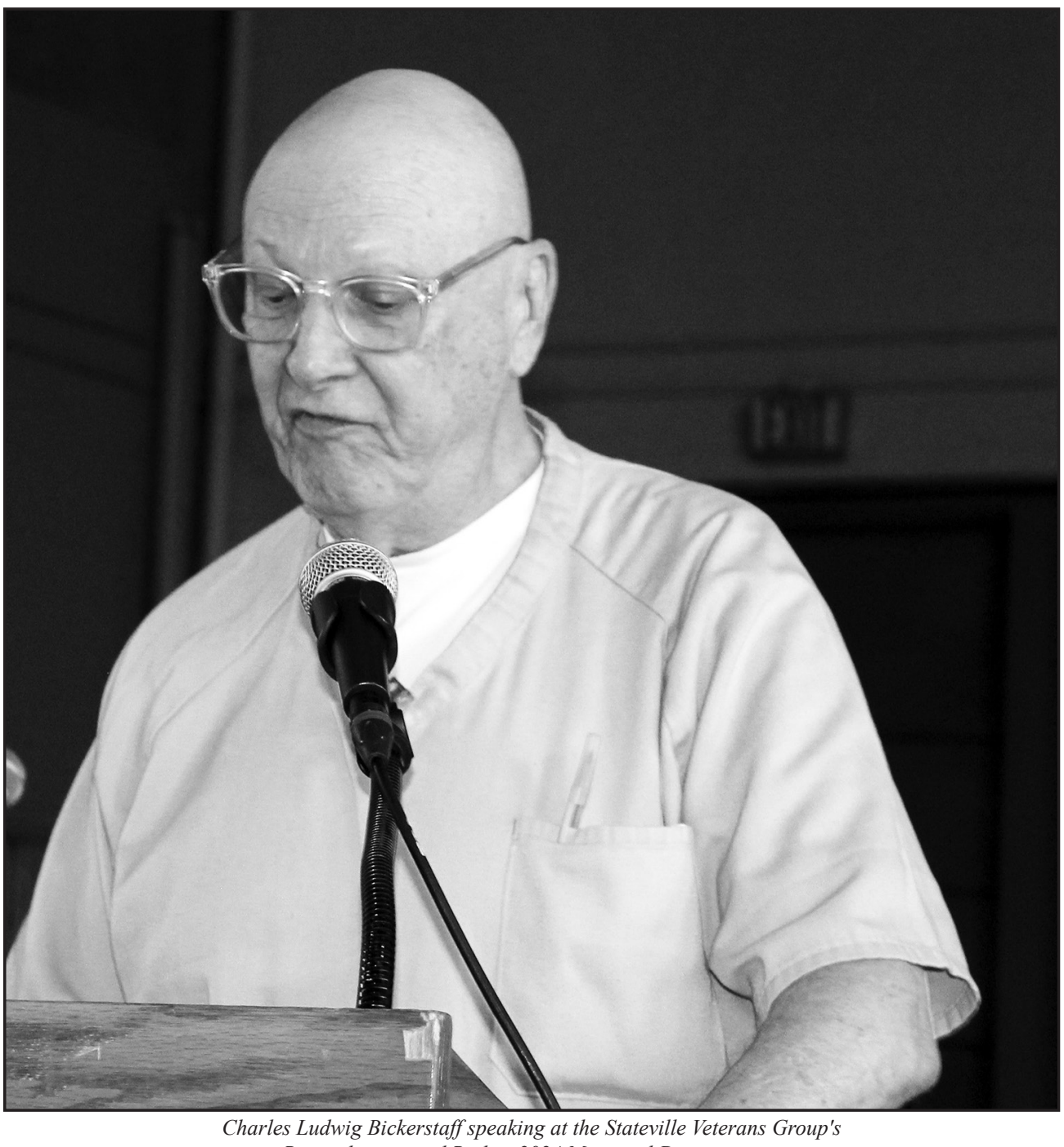
Charles Ludwig Bickerstaff

The local newspapers, *The Gazette* in Sterling and Rockfalls, Illinois, and the *Telegraph* in Dixon, Illinois, used to give voice to the disenfranchised. Through the years, these papers would print, in their "Readers Voice" column, letters from people imprisoned at Dixon and Stateville Correctional Centers. But no longer. Even my letters supporting small-town newspapers or on voting rights go unpublished.

I am an Army brat and Navy veteran. Before that, I was a citizen and blessed with certain obligations I took seriously and encouraged others to do. One of those obligations was voting.

Prisoners in Illinois are not allowed to vote even if they are citizens of the United States. Why? According to Richard Haass, a conservative and former State Department official, "democracy requires that citizens take an active part including an obligation to vote. We don't require people to vote, but politicians make it difficult and often disenfranchise swaths of folks who could and should be voting." (*The Bill of Obligations*, 2023, p. 53)

Nationwide, an estimated 4.6 million Americans are unable to vote as a result of laws that disenfranchise persons with a felony conviction. (*American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, 2002). Twelve states do not allow those who have completed their sentence to cast a ballot. Fortunately, Illinois is not one of those twelve, but still, the state has chosen to further penalize and withhold First Amendment rights to some thirty-thousand who are currently behind bars, including several thousand who are military veterans. (www.sentencingproject.org) Prisoners in Maine, Vermont, and The District of Columbia are allowed to cast a ballot. Why not in Illinois? Shouldn't all US citizens be treated equally?



Charles Ludwig Bickerstaff speaking at the Stateville Veterans Group's Remembrance and Rights, 2024 Memorial Day program.

Until my conviction, I had voted in ten presidential elections. I even cast an absentee ballot from the Lee County jail in 2008. Did I suddenly lose my citizenship in 2009?

Prisoners are counted in the local census. Those communities get extra funding and extra representation based on those incarcerated. Many still pay state and federal taxes. Why are they not allowed to help choose leaders and influence policy in a government of, by, and for the people?

Charles Ludwig Bickerstaff is a Navy veteran imprisoned in Illinois. He was an active member of the Stateville Veterans Group until the closing of Stateville Prison in 2024.

The Heads, With Gratitude

John "Buddha" Tieman

It's late at night when I remember The Heads most clearly. In Vietnam, in 1970, The Heads gathered every night in our bunker, where we got high. Bong song bombers, Cambodian Red, Park Lanes, Montagnard bowls from which we'd give "shotguns". The Heads—CW, Ollie, Chuck, Dick, Sandy, Poncho, Arnie, Thompson, Steve, Mike. Others. These are the guys who saved my life, because these are the guys who saved my soul.

Before I write another word, this disclaimer. I'm not promoting drugs. I've been clean and sober for 34 years. This isn't an essay about drugs. It's an essay about love.

When you see a war movie, some guy invariably saves another guy's life. He pulls his buddy from a burning tank, a flaming airplane, stuff like that. But here's what I learned in Vietnam. There's more to surviving a war than just living. There's also saving your soul.

You might think all my memories of The Nam are all Red Alerts and truck convoys and the Cambodian Invasion and such. And sometimes that's true. Not tonight. Tonight, late at night in my study, when I look around my modest home, my beloved wife asleep in the next room, I say a prayer of such gratitude. Gratitude because I remember the night Ollie saved my soul. I'm alone in the bunker. Ollie, a burly Black guy from Louisiana, comes into the bunker, lights a "j", pops a tape into the cassette, and says "You gotta hear this, man." He plays "Our House" by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. And Ollie smiled a smile, and Ollie dreamed a dream. And for just a second, with one of the Heads, I too dreamed a dream of gentleness and love. There. In a bunker. In a jungle 10,000 miles from here. In the middle of a war. Gentleness and love.

A bit of background I was stationed at the 4th Infantry Division's base camp, Camp Radcliff, at An Khe in the Central Highlands. I was in the Division Band. Almost every night, there were rocket and sapper attacks. Some nights, Charlie would lob a rocket in just to keep us awake. One night, sappers blew up 21 helicopters. I did nothing heroic or even noteworthy. Nonetheless, most of us suffered from varying levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One buddy qualified for 100% disability.

But about The Heads. After hours, we had our own bunker in which, well, let's just say the pot smoking was prodigious. We did our duty. Some of us even got medals. But when the off hours came, party tonight for tomorrow we die. We were hippie soldiers. My war name was "Buddha". Plenty of weed and plenty of cool sounds. Jimi. Janis. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Chicago. Joe Cocker. Our hospitality was legendary. Often, as the sun set, Heads from nearby units joined us. I remember medics, mechanics, a physician, clerks, drivers, and lots of grunts.

I'd never met folks like The Heads. I grew up in St. Louis. My life was narrow. I joined the army in 1969. In the States, the band was a separate unit comprised solely of musicians. A master's degree was not uncommon. In 1970, in Vietnam, I was part of a company that included drivers, mechanics, grunts, typists, drivers. I was good friends with an auto worker from Ohio, a Chicano from San Antonio, a Black guy from Louisiana, a hippie from Los Angeles, a piano player from Detroit. Our armorer, Mike, was from Chicago. We were young. Chuck, a jazz trumpeter from Dallas we called "Pop". He was 24. I was 20.

These guys saved my soul. What did they save my soul from? Despair. I knew two guys, from a nearby company, who committed suicide. They had a suicide pact. Another guy went berserk and shot dead four of his buddies before they shot him dead. I watched while they killed him. Why did I not despair? Because The Heads saved my soul. Because The Heads taught me this simple lesson. There is more to surviving than just living. From The Heads and other war buddies, I learned that kindness, compassion, gentleness and simple goodness, these are always of paramount importance. Indeed, compassion is never more important than when cruelty seems to rule; gentleness is never more important than when strength seems the only value.

Today, I am 74 years old. I've kept up with a few of The Heads. Most have faded as the mist fades with the dawn. Of course, kindness wasn't limited to The Heads. Don wasn't a Head, and he's one of the most compassionate human beings I've ever met. But now and again, often late at night, I remember. Like tonight, how I remember Ollie and "Our House". I feel nothing but gratitude for Ollie. Because once, in 1970, he saved my soul. And he saved it not with a bullet or a Claymore mine, but with a song about love and home.

John Samuel Tieman is a widely published poet, essayist, and translator. A retired teacher, he serves on the City Council of University City, Missouri, an inner ring suburb of St. Louis. This article originally appeared in his weekly column published by Axar.az, a popular daily news service in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Prisoner of War

The night terrors ended—one night, or
maybe over many nights—bleeding out

till there was nothing left but fragments
like the shrapnel that kept rising to the

surface of my skin. Even the names Lonny,
Devil, Spike, Lee—faded into echoes, and

then were gone. I pressed them onto rice
paper at The Wall once, and put them between

the pages of a book like dead flowers, but
they're gone too, lost, along with the book,

sometime during the days when I kept moving
to forget where I'd been. Fifty years, and all

that's left to haunt me are these useless
medals I've kept. I found them in a box

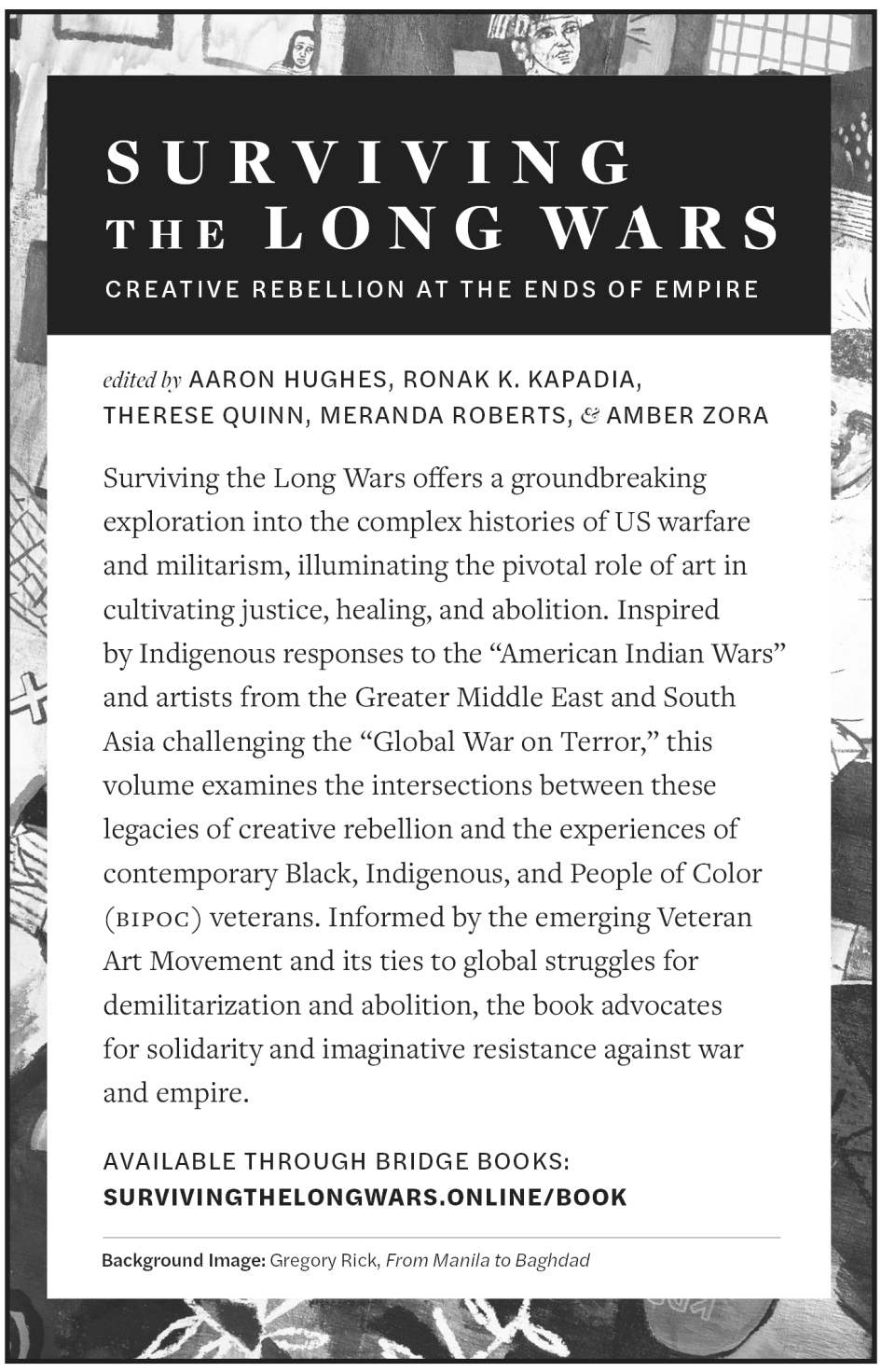
with some old photographs—Janice, my
sixteen-year-old wife, in a wedding dress,

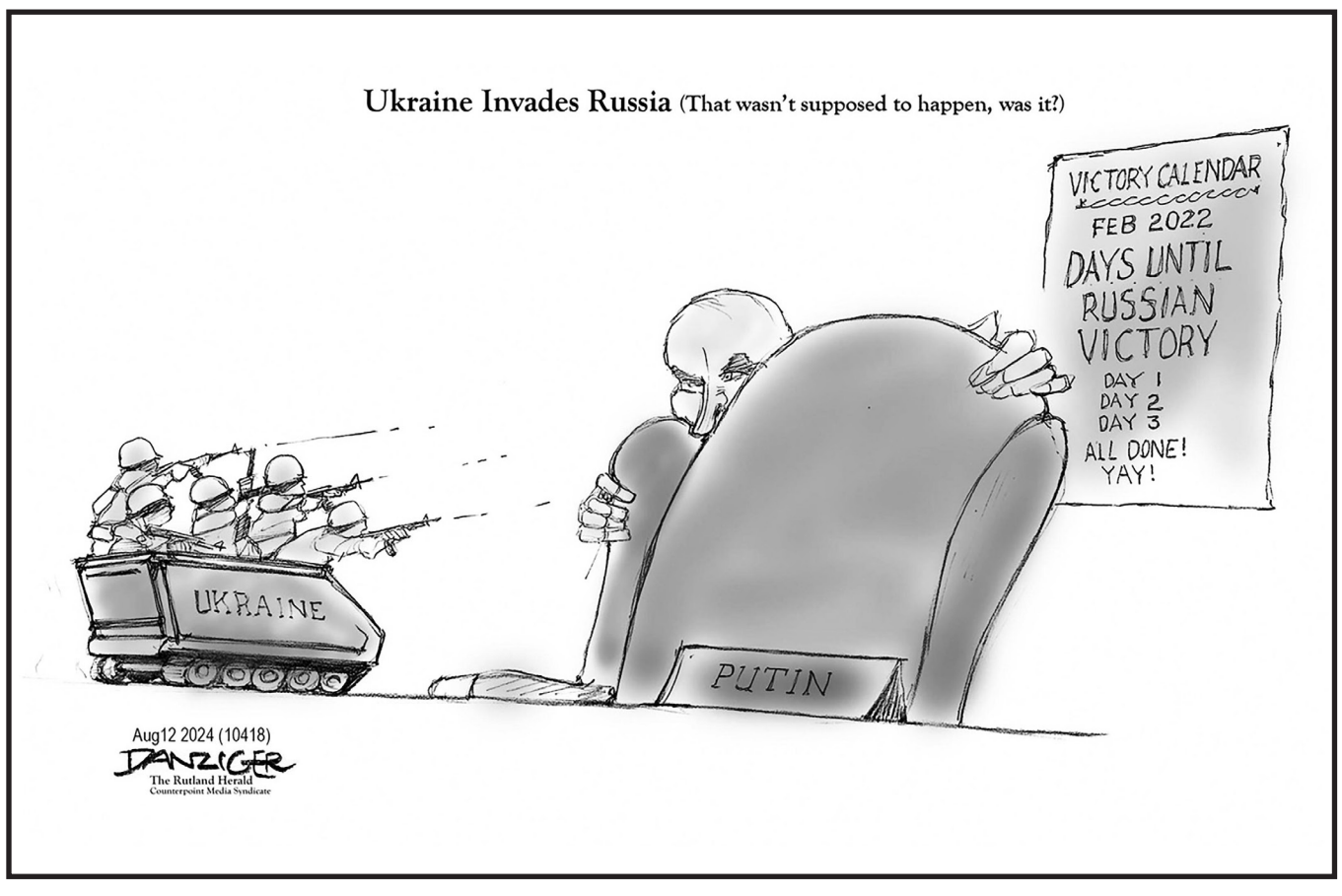
me, in my Advanced Infantry Training
graduation greens, and these dog tags

I hold—name, rank, and serial number—
as if there were always another self,

a prisoner of war living inside my closet
waiting, ever waiting to be freed.

—*rg cantalupo*





Empowerment through Education and Micro-Credit in Vietnam

Bhavia Wagner

Micro-credit recipients the program is supporting.

First, I want to thank the readers of *The Veteran* for providing enough funds to ensure that 31 Vietnamese girls living in poverty can now stay in school through high school graduation. This is a great gift in an impoverished area where students typically drop out of school to work on the family farm, in road construction, or to get married at a young age.

The children receiving your support live in the remote mountainous Ha Giang Province. This province is located in the far north of Vietnam, on the border with China. It is hard to make a living in this rural area with its rugged terrain. Most families are farmers who grow corn or rice.

The students receiving your support come from five indigenous ethnic groups, including Dao and Hmong. Most of the children are in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Their families come from the lowest rungs of poverty in Vietnam, and some of their parents are illiterate. Local teachers and the school principals selected the students. Girls were chosen because they are more disadvantaged than boys.

Our funds are distributed to the children each year by our partner organizations: Platypus (a non-profit from Australia providing aid to Vietnam) and the Vietnam Women's Union (an extremely reputable Vietnamese organization). Volunteers run Platypus in Australia, and there is one part-time Vietnamese staff member in Vietnam.

Each child receives $100 covering school supplies, a school uniform, and some food for their families. Statistics show that education for girls is one of the most effective ways of ending poverty. When women are educated, they can earn more and improve life for their children by providing better nutrition, health care, and education.

Double benefit from your gifts

Thanks to our generous donors, we have raised nearly $20,000 to support our poor rural students through high school. Most children have four to six years of school ahead of them. Instead of letting the money reserved for future school years sit idle, we are temporarily using about $8,000 for two-year micro-credit loans for poor women in Vietnam. Entrepreneurial rural women are using the funds to start income-generation projects, which help improve their family's living conditions. The average loan is about $400.

The poor in Vietnam have limited access to credit, and usually, their only option is to borrow from unscrupulous private lenders who charge very high interest rates. Sometimes, villagers are told they must pay back double what they borrowed. Poor people hesitate to borrow because they lack confidence in their ability to repay the debt. They know they could lose their farm if they default on their loan.

Women's economic empowerment is one of the best ways to end poverty, along with girls' education.

This year, twenty women were given interest-free loans in Quang Binh District in Ha Giang Province, where our scholarship students are located. Most of these enterprising women are raising pigs. A few are raising chickens or ducks for eggs or meat. One woman started a little grocery store. Another woman is cooking food and selling it. All the women are mothers with children.

Help us end poverty in Vietnam by empowering people to help themselves

Please help us provide loans to more poor families in Vietnam. Four hundred dollars helps one ambitious mother work her way out of poverty. Later, those funds will be used to keep four children from dropping out of school for a year.

Donations of any amount are most welcome and will be a tremendous help. You can send a check to Friendship with Cambodia, PO Box 5231, Eugene, OR 97405, or donate online at friendshipwithcambodia.org. Donations are tax-deductible.

Friendship with Cambodia is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing aid to Cambodia since 2003. Friendship with Cambodia's founder, Bhavia Wagner, has been volunteering to help Vietnam since 1992 as an act of friendship and reconciliation.

Visit our projects on a motorcycle tour in Vietnam

Platypus, our partner organization from Australia, offers off-the-beaten-track motorcycle tours of Vietnam each year, and you are invited to participate. The 15-day tour includes Hanoi, Cat Ba Island in beautiful Halong Bay, and the scenic mountains of Ha Giang Province (where our projects are).

Riders experience breathtaking landscapes, unparalleled hospitality from the rural communities, and great camaraderie. You will meet some of the school children receiving support from Platypus. The cost of approximately $2,200 includes hotels, homestays, delicious food, and a donation to support aid programs in Vietnam. You can ride in the support vehicle if you don't want to ride a motorcycle. Visit their website for more details about their tours at platypus-charity.org.

Bhavia Wagner led friendship tours in Vietnam for Global Exchange in 1992 and 1994 and has volunteered to help poor children in Vietnam ever since. She is the founder and director of Friendship with Cambodia and author of Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia.

A scenic motorcycle tour in Vietnam visiting the aid programs.

Ethnic minority students receive support to stay in school.

A woman with her micro-enterprise project—raising pigs.

THE VETERAN
SECTION C
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Barry Romo, Presente!

VVAW

Barry L. Romo, a long-time member and leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and lifelong advocate for anti-war and veterans causes, passed on May 1, 2024. May Day.

Barry Romo was born to Louis and Lillian Romo on July 24, 1947. He was raised in a tight-knit family in San Bernardino, California, as a devout Catholic, and he attended St. Aquinas High School. His father's family is Mexican American with roots going back hundreds of years in California and New Mexico. His mother was a British "war bride". His older brother was Harold Louis Romo (born in 1921), who was a parent to Robert (Bobby) Romo, Richard L. Romo, and Beverly A. Romo, and his older sister was Glorine Romo (born in 1928), who had three children, Gary, Linda, and Randy.

After graduating high school, Barry enlisted in the US Army in 1966. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant upon graduation from Officer Candidate School (OCS) at 19. He was sent to Vietnam in 1967 and served there until May 1968, first as an Infantry Platoon Leader and subsequently as a First Lieutenant and Battalion Staff Officer. He was a participant in the January and February 1968 Tet Offensive. He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and the Bronze Star with "V" Device "for heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force." In May 1968, his nephew Robert was killed at Dong Ha, and Barry escorted the body home to Rialto, ending his military service in Vietnam. He then commanded an Infantry Vietnam Training Company at Fort Ord, California, before being honorably discharged in January 1969.

After serving in Vietnam, he got into San Bernardino Valley College because a History Professor, George Ashton, helped him fill out his papers and get classes while he emerged from his combat state of mind. While attending Valley College, Barry began to get involved in activism, including openly opposing the war he had fought in. He joined the peace and justice movement and participated in VVAW's Winter Soldier Investigation in early 1971. He helped to organize other veterans on the West Coast to participate in VVAW's Dewey Canyon III in Washington, DC, in April 1971, when hundreds of Vietnam veterans threw their medals away.

Barry Romo at Dewey Canyon III, Washington, DC, April, 1971.

Elected to the National Office of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in 1972, he traveled across the country organizing and speaking for peace. He also helped to organize The Last Patrol, the veterans' demonstration in Miami against the Republican National Convention in 1972.

Barry would return to Vietnam in December 1972, this time to Hanoi with Christmas packages for 535 prisoners of war, along with Telford Taylor, a chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg War Trials, and the pacifist singer Joan Baez. He lived under Nixon's infamous Christmas bombing for its entire eleven days. The only combat veteran to have fought in the South while later living under bombings in the North (except POWs), he documented the bombing of foreign embassies, hospitals, workers' houses, and even POW camps. Baez would record the album *Where Are You Now, My Son?* based on their experience. Years later, the History Channel's 2011 documentary *Vietnam in HD* featured Barry's military service and activism.

His work in the 1970s started a lifetime of organizing against war and in support of greater veterans' benefits. He also fought to increase veterans' rights, including the expansion of VA healthcare, the recognition and treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Agent Orange exposure, support for homeless veterans, and decent benefits for all veterans regardless of discharge type.

In 1987, Barry was part of the first post-war VVAW delegation to Vietnam and spent ten days there. He felt it was better to visit Vietnam as a guest of the government of Vietnam than as an invader sent by the US government. In 1989, Barry went to the Philippines to document the abuse of child prostitutes by US service members, along with human rights violations by the US trained and funded Philippine military. In 1999, he traveled to Colombia to investigate and document a massacre at Santa Domingo village on the northern border. He visited the village in the contested countryside and found proof that the Colombian military had used US helicopters and bombs to kill 19 people—including seven children—in cold blood.

Barry was responsible for publishing the VVAW newspaper, *The Veteran* (and its precursors), for 23 years. In the late 1980s and 1990s when membership and interest waned, he kept VVAW going. Barry's apartment served as VVAW's National Office for many years, the focal point for work, meetings, and parties.

Barry Romo at VVAW Veterans Day event, Chicago, 2005.

Along with serving as a VVAW National Coordinator for over four decades, Barry was a former Branch President of his facility for the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, AFL-CIO, until he retired in 2009. As part of this work, he was a union steward who staunchly defended the rights of his coworkers.

In the 1980s, Barry served on the Veterans Advisory Committee for Mayor Harold Washington and the City of Chicago's Human Rights Commission.

Barry was also dedicated to speaking at local high schools and universities about his military service and activism. He frequently spoke at Chicagoland Public Schools at the invitation of local teachers, including his friends Joan Davis, Kurt Hilgendorf, and Jackson Potter.

Following his retirement from the Post Office in 2009, Barry spent his time volunteering. This work included playing a critical role in supporting Iraq Veterans Against the War, founded in 2006. After 2006, he spent much time mentoring and supporting returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Barry also supported the Keep Chicago Renting Campaign, drawing connections between housing instability and veterans' homelessness. He supported Chuy Garcia's campaign for mayor in 2015 and was actively involved in campaigns supporting a higher minimum wage in Chicago. As a patient of the Jesse Brown VA Hospital, Barry supported the labor rights and organizing of the National Nurses United (NNU), the American Federation of Governmental Employees (AFGE), and the Services Employee International Union (SEIU). Barry frequently spoke out about the connections between patient care and labor rights and befriended many of the staff who cared for him at his local VA hospital.

Barry also volunteered to provide security at anti-war and activist events, including Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan (2008), the Brew Not Bombs fundraising events (2009-2011), and the 2012 NATO Medal Return Ceremony in Chicago. For 25 years, Barry could be found washing pots at the twice yearly Homeless Veterans Standdown. Along with his volunteer work, he spent his retirement years taking long walks in Chicago, spending time with friends, and going to music venues such as Rosa's Lounge, The Hideout, and Quenchers Lounge. He would also frequently have breakfast at Taqueria Moran in Logan Square with friends, many of whom were younger veterans and organizers.

Barry's life was greatly impacted and shaped by his time in Vietnam. He dedicated his life to ending that war and fighting for social justice and the rights of the oppressed. He wanted to be remembered for the people he helped and the lives he saved, not those he took in Vietnam.

Barry was passionate about social justice and would vigorously defend his positions. He also knew that the seriousness of the causes required laughter and partying as a release. He touched hundreds—if not thousands—of lives and left a lasting imprint on those he encountered. He often said it was in the movement, not the military, where he formed lifelong friendships in the struggle.

Barry had hundreds of books. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of pretty much every global situation and movement for change. He read scores and scores of books about Vietnam.

Barry enthusiastically supported VVAW's recent efforts to build libraries in Vietnam. He felt we owed the Vietnamese people for the devastation our country wreaked upon theirs.

Barry is preceded in death by countless VVAW and IVAW members, many of whom became victims of war after they came home. Barry is survived by his two children, Kyle Copeland and Jessi O'Reilly-Jones, his niece Beverly Mendoza and the entire Mendoza family, and his ex-wife Alynne Romo. Barry spent much of the last months of his life with his beloved son Kyle Copeland, who began traveling monthly from San Francisco to Chicago to see his father. Copeland was grateful to be with Romo as he passed, and he loved his father very much.

VVAW has created a guestbook for Barry, at www.vvaw.org/barryromoguestbook/

Barry would want his family, friends, comrades, and all who read this to continue the struggle—though they know it won't be the same without Barry Romo at their side.

Some Barry Romo Memories

Edward Damato

Seeing Jeff Machota's name on my caller ID at 7:30 AM on May 2 told me bad news was coming my way. It was bad news, indeed. My dear friend, fellow veteran, mentor, and all-around dedicated fighter for veterans and for peace and justice was no longer with us in body. I've read obituaries from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and seen the wonderful testimonials given at his memorial services in Chicago by friends, including Iraq veterans, about his dedication and the effects he had on their lives served Barry beyond well. I can add some of my memories of him over the fifty-three years I knew him.

In February of 1971, after the Winter Soldier hearings in Detroit, it was obvious that our group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, was a force waiting to go national. The people in the VVAW office in New York, including Al, Jan, Scott, John, and Joe, organized our first national meeting.

Barry was chosen to be the California Coordinator, and I was chosen to be the New York Coordinator. We hit it off immediately. We were the only ones, maybe 5'8" (everyone else seemed so tall), and maybe with the same sense of humor! The national organization was launched, and our first national action was picked to be in Washington DC, Dewey Canyon III, in April of 1971. We organized our hearts out.

On the first day of Operation Dewey Canyon III, I saw Barry across an expanse of grass at the National Mall. He came running up to me with his arms wide open and grabbed me in a big, welcoming bear hug. What a joy—seeing each other again, this time with all our fellow veterans from VVAW chapters from around the country. And, boy, did those five days turn out to be a historic event. It truly was. Right in our nation's capital, veterans of an ongoing war were protesting against it. One headline read, "Vets Overturn Supreme Court." Wow! Barry and I got to know each other better. His enthusiasm was infectious, a trait he never lost in all the years I knew him.

He was elected to the national office, and I worked with him while he was in New York. Shortly afterward, the national office moved to Chicago. A national meeting was held in Palo Alto, California, which I attended along with four others from my state: Joe, Phil, Rob, and Sue.

On the first night, Barry said he wanted to talk to me. He took me up a hill in the twilight. He warned me not to fall into what he said was the San Andreas Fault. The San Andreas Fault! Me in the San Andreas Fault! I was amazed, thinking that was what he wanted to show me. But it wasn't. He told me he was seriously considering not running for re-election. At first, I was at a loss for words. Then I told him he had to continue in the office. I told him that the nature of the war was changing, and it was vitally important to keep VVAW on course to see an end to the war and what came afterward. I told him I thought there would be a leadership vacuum because everyone respected him so much, and he had an incredible grasp of issues of politics. We talked for a long while, and finally, he agreed that he would run again. I was so relieved and thankful.

Shortly after the Palo Alto meeting, I decided that I would run to be in the national office if nominated. I was elected at the next national meeting. I felt that if I asked him to stay at the job, it would be the least I could do to support and work with Barry along with Brian, Sam, Steve, Marla, Bill, Charley, and later Pete, Rich, and Bill Davis.

We worked our asses off, including writing and publishing our newspaper, *Winter Soldier* which became *The Veteran*. During those years, we saw the aftermath of the horrific Christmas bombings in Vietnam, the signing of the peace accords in Paris, the focus on veterans' issues, the wildly delirious euphoria of seeing Nixon turned out of office (on my birthday(!), and the budding battle for amnesty for war resisters. Barry shined during this time. Because he was in Hanoi during the bombings, he also traveled around the country, speaking of what he viewed as his second tour in Vietnam.

I remember we got jobs to help support the office. Before I was drafted, I had worked for Korvettes, a department store chain. I used my boss there as a reference. They hired me on the spot. The next day, Barry went and used me as a reference. He was hired, too. We worked in the hardware department.

The Chicago VVAW National Office in 1973: (l-r back row) Rich Bangert, Ed Damato, Barry Romo (l-r front row) Marla Watson, Sam Schorr, Brian Adams.

In 1978, I moved back to New York, and I didn't see him very much, but I received two calls of note. The first was to tell me he was marrying Alynne and asked me to be his best man. I was so honored I immediately said yes and bought a new suit and shoes. I flew to Chicago and enjoyed the weekend festivities. One of the most memorable things was that I met his wonderful parents, who flew in from California. What lovely people they were. They raised a wonderful son.

The second time he called me was in 1987, asking me to be part of the five-person, first VVAW delegation to go to Vietnam, both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. We flew to Bangkok with Pete Zastrow, Tom Wetzler, Dennis Kroll, Barry, and me to apply for visas since you couldn't apply in the US then. We then flew to Hanoi and spent five days meeting with various Vietnamese officials, touring sites, and walking the streets.

We went to Bach Mai Hospital, where Barry first toured during the Christmas bombings. They remembered him. Needless to say, it was a highlight of our trip. We then flew to Ho Chi Minh City and met more officials, including military officers. We took tours and even took a trip to see fish farms in the Mekong Delta, where I was stationed. At each meeting, Barry introduced us, made statements, and presented gifts we brought. He did everything so expertly, and I believe he did our organization proud. Afterward, we had to fly back to Bangkok, and while there, we discussed how to proceed. We realized that the trip was a cathartic experience for all of us, seeing Vietnam thrive in peace.

I last spoke with Barry for a couple of hours about a year and a half ago. I was devastated to hear of his passing. It leaves a void in me, making it hard to write these words. I know that for many years, when faced with a problem, I would ask myself, "What would Barry do?"

Edward Damato has been a member of VVAW since 1970 and lives in New York.

Ed and Barry on a tank in Vietnam in Cu Chi, 1987.

Barry Romo with Che and his son Kyle, San Bernadino, California, 1974. Photo by Edward Damato.

Barry Romo Memories

VVAW and Friends

Jeff Machota:

My good friend, comrade, and leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War for over 53 years passed away last night—on May Day—at the age of 76. Barry Romo has been a close friend for over 35 years. Please share your memories of Barry here. There will be more details and tributes to come. Barry Romo, Presente!

Aaron Hughes:

I'll miss you, Barry.

Tim Teater:

My sincere condolences to Barry's family and all of his VVAW family. Barry and VVAW changed my life forever in a profoundly positive way. Barry and VVAW opened my eyes to many ideas and possibilities and made me a better person and I am eternally grateful. Rest in Peace Barry in the knowledge you made a positive difference.

Kenneth Dalton:

I'm so sorry to hear of his passing. I met him on several occasions in NYC and DC and it was a real pleasure to be in his company.

Patrick McCann:

I can still picture staying at his place on a trip to Chicago decades ago. He and I just sitting around the kitchen table talking.

I remember marching (and being in a ruckus) in Philly for the Buy-Centennial.

Dewey Canyon IV in DC where we all picked up somebody's car that was parked in our way, and moved it across the street, ha ha!

Rest In Power, Barry!

Christy Vinter Klim:

I met Barry in the 80's, while planning and attending Dewey Canyon IV. His steadfast commitment to anti-war activism has been a constant source of inspiration. He was a master storyteller, with a sparkle of humor mixed in. The world has lost a bright light. Barry Romo, presente!

Lori Ann Payne:

I knew Barry from the post office at O'Hare. What a great guy! I will miss his wit and his smile. He was a very special guy.

Gerald R Gioglio:

Condolences to the family.

You ran the race, now Rest in Peace.

Jim Wohlgemuth:

I did not know Barry personally but I knew him from the VVAW news and actions. He was one of the inspirations that got me to start sending in my dues. That is why when I got the email, Barry Romo, Presente, my heart just sank.

Steve Geiger:

Very sorry to hear of his passing. I knew Barry through his organizing and writing in VVAW. And on at least one occasion when he came to New York. He was a sharp wit and tireless worker for the anti-war movement. One of our Best and Brightest, impossible to replace. The stars are falling, but their work will carry on. PRESENTE!

Mark Hartford:

I first met Barry when he was 14. I was 13 and we were freshman in high school. Later, after graduation, Barry, Jeff (another friend) and I joined the Army. We were together through basic and then never saw each other again until we were all out. Barry and Jeff then moved into my garage and we all went back to school on the GI bill... during this time Barry was invited to participate in the Winter Soldier Investigation put on by VVAW. He came back with a box of VVAW pins and a mission of organizing VVAW in CA. I volunteered to help and off we went. We spoke at high schools, people's homes and many campuses throughout CA. Barry went off to the national office and I started working on getting an older vet (Gary Lawton) out of jail and free from charges of killing 2 police officers in Riverside. The rest, as they say, is history. We have stayed in touch over the years. He was my friend longer than anyone else I know. RIP my brother. You deserve it.

Arny Stieber:

I was aVVAW Michigan coordinator for a bit and had Barry speak, via speaker phone (pre Zoom), in Detroit at a showing of Winter Soldier. I moved to Chicago and met Barry. We spoke at a number of high schools in Chicago. He was very open with the students and gave them the real picture of war. He'll be missed.

Kaley Clements:

I am very sorry to hear about Barry's passing.

https://youtu.be/3uunJ7BuxQQ

This is a video I made of Barry back in 2009 about his peace trip to HaNoi during the 1972 Christmas Bombings. He went to HaNoi during the American War in Vietnam as part of a peace delegation with Telford Taylor, Joan Baez, and Reverend Michael Allen. Thanks so much for sharing your time with me and helping to bring an end to the unjust American War in Vietnam. I was sad to hear of your passing today, but your legacy of love and courage will live on as a reminder for the power of peaceful protest and that an individual's actions can help bring about big change.

Much Love,

Barry and his nephew Bobby Romo.

Roberto Clack:

Rest In Power Barry Romo! My condolences to VVAW and Barry's family.

Kurt Hilgendorf:

Barry was an inspiration and mentor to generations of justice-seeking people. A true people's champion. RIP, Barry, we'll all miss you.

Claire Shimabukuro:

Barry Romo was a leader and a hero.

Barry sat next to my cousin Scott on the Third World panel at the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit in 1971. VVAW organized the investigation to expose the immorality and brutal imperialism of the USA. The Third World panel spoke frankly about the racism and misogyny within the military, against the Vietnamese people and within the US. Barry spoke about the heavy casualties suffered by Chicanos and Puerto Rican soldiers.

When I moved to Chicago from Hawaii in '77, I spent a lot of time at the VVAW house, using their printing machine to produce leaflets. I got to know and break bread with Barry, Eddie, Pete, Bill and others. They were deep and honorable men, forever haunted by their war experiences and dedicated warriors for justice because of them.

Barry told me that he will forever remember two examples of heroism in Vietnam: one was a man who told Barry that he would never carry a weapon and so he went into the field, into battles carrying no firearms and served as a medic and the other was a Black soldier who, one day, handed his rifle to Barry and said, "they killed Martin Luther King today. I will no longer fight for America—it's not my country." Barry asked him if he knew what was in store for him in the stockade and being dishonorably discharged and the man said "yes." Barry was overwhelmed emotionally as he watched the soldier being marched away by MPs.

Barry Romo was the chair and chief coordinator of the Rich Off Our Backs demo in Philadelphia in '76. He later spoke to me about issues of sectarianism and homophobia being deterrents to a united front.

I marched alongside Barry and the vets on the '78 African Liberation Day in DC. The cause of defeating apartheid in South Africa was triumphant in great part to a worldwide united front support effort.

I am grateful to have been able to visit with Barry a couple of times back in Chicago in '16 and '17. He was always warm and comradely. All of our conversations were neither shallow nor academically theoretical. They were always deep, reflective and thoughtful.

I cannot fathom that he is gone.

Barry Romo: PRESENTE!

Helen Horn:

My deep sympathy to Barry's family and many many friends. We go back to the 1972 Democratic and Republican conventions in Miami. Too many memories need to be shared some future evening sitting with a bottle of rum (or not) among some of his many friends.

Dana Hall:

Feel so fortunate to cross Barry's path in Chicago and get to know him a little… Bunked in the same room and was sad to witness that he still had bad dreams after all those years… Respected him so much, I understand that he was an effective but patient leader that didn't bust his subordinates. I was so screwed up in Chicago, recovering from a year of HepC treatment, wishing I would have stayed in better touch with Barry and other VVAW members. Rest in Peace Barry….

Jeanne Friedman:

I met Barry (and Mark Hartford) in San Bernardino sometime between 1969 and 1971. He was a dynamic and thoughtful anti-war activist, using his wartime experience to bring others to understand the true nature of the Vietnam war. He was a powerful comrade and friend, and a truth-teller for many years. He will be missed.

John Zutz:

I ran into Barry the first time at a VVAW July 4 campout in the mid-80s. He was the established leader, I was the FNG. Feeling patriotic, I draped Old Glory over the stage. Soon he approached and asked me to remove the flag since it had dominated so many instances of horrendous persecution and sadism. Being the rookie I complied, but by the next morning my tent was decorated with a dozen small flags. He was big enough that he didn't say anything till later. We sat around the fire while he explained the aversion to celebrating the flag and how it was being used by "patriots." Then he changed his mind after I explained that the flag was programmed into us, and that it caused a reflex reaction, and that it

continued on next page

Barry Romo in Vietnam, 1967.

Barry Romo Memories

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belonged to all of us. He realized we could despair the negatives but use the positives. Imagine that—a leader who could change his stand! We got along just fine for all those years. RIP

Joe Petzel:

Met Barry when the National Office moved to Chicago in the early 70s. Didn't always agree with him but we were brothers in our efforts to end that war. He was all in. Rest in Peace brother.

Diane Ford:

In some ways, this is the hardest phase of life. It seems that the forces-that-be hover over us, picking us off one by one at will. But how lucky we are to have made it this far! Barry and his comrades dedicated their entire adult lives to social justice. No matter what your politics are, how can you not be moved and thankful to them? Goodbye, Barry from just one more person who, over the years, forever saw your light.

Bruce E. Bernstein:

Barry Romo was a titan, a great man and also a good man. That is a rare combination.

I knew Barry from 1976, the July 4th "Rich Off Our Backs" coalition. Several of the leaders—Barry, Ed Damato from VVAW in NY, Glenn Kirby, and maybe one or two others shared a small, sort of run down apt in South Philadelphia which they called The Barracks. I was the head of youth work for the coalition. We later set up a house in N. Philly, even more run down, and figured if Barry et. al. had The Barracks, we would call our place The Pits. Which it was.

I later moved to Chicago and recall well the great old Vets House that Barry lived in on the South Side, and some of the other VVAW leaders who lived there.

Barry was a true leader and also an approachable humanist. He will be missed but his legacy will live on.

Andy Berman:

I lived in Chicago for many years, active in the Veterans for Peace Chapter which often worked with VVAW on Veterans Day, Memorial Day and other peace and justice events. Barry was always warm and welcoming, the epitome of a terrific organizer.

In difficult times when political differences threaten unity in the progressive community, Barry was a voice for unity. His lessons live on.

Cat Miller Harper:

Barry, Thank you for sowing seeds to fight for justice in so many hearts, including mine, which now aches that you are gone. What a firecracker you were! I hope you are able to rest now without the bad dreams, in a place of everlasting peace. Presente!

Joan Davis:

Barry was a great friend and fighter for veterans. I have so many memories of the many years we advocated for veterans rights. He spoke at my high school history class for many years, inspiring and hopefully scaring the heck out of students considering the service. A little crazy. Full of love. He will be missed.

Joe Rubas:

My sincere condolences to all of Barry's family, friends, and amazing members of VVAW. I first met Barry in one of Joe Miller's classes at UIUC in 1992. I cannot think of another moment in my life where one person's words changed the way I thought about EVERYTHING. Barry was courageous, tough, compassionate, brilliant, and inspirational. Barry helped me connect with my uncle who had been severely wounded in Vietnam in a way that would not have been possible before I met Barry. Barry helped me understand. Barry completely changed the trajectory of my life for the better. I am forever grateful that I got to meet Barry. A true hero. One of a kind.

Monique Lewis:

My condolences to the family! Barry was a great friend. I am truly going to miss him and our talks. Rest Well Soldier In God's Arms! You and Bobby are once again together!

Buzz Doyle:

More thought, feelings than I can write here. He was my friend and will be missed.

Richard Grossman:

First met Barry in the 1980s when I was manager of the New World Resource Center bookstore in Chicago. Barry lived a few blocks away and would stop by to drop off copies of *The Veteran*. A great person and a great Comrade. Will be missed. Rest in Power Companero!

Dave Kettenhofen:

Barry was a comrade, mentor, and most importantly a good friend. I feel privileged to have served with him in the National Office. Rest in Peace brother.

Keith Stoney:

You were a great friend. I will miss you dearly.

Mardi Johnson:

Rest in the assurance your heroism, bravery, commitment and love will not be forgotten.

Love you, Mardi.

Meg Miner:

I'm grateful to have met such a powerful force of nature. A real advocate for his beliefs and the people he believed in...and no shrinking violet

Barry Romo and Mark Hartford in San Bernadino, California, 1970.

Barry Romo (front right) on Capitol Steps during Dewey Canyon III in April 1971.

in calling out BS when he smelled it! So glad to be on the same side as Barry!

On hearing the news, the first thought that came to mind was of his bone crushing hugs—talk about leaving an impression! And he had a ready smile that always made me feel welcome. I also remember lots of laughter and camaraderie among the kitchen crew as we cleaned pots and pans and giant coffee makers during Chicago Stand Down.

Peter Zastrow:

We worked together in the VVAW national office from 1974 on. He was a significant anti-war voice, later a voice for veterans. The heart and soul of VVAW for 50 years. A great loss.

Ken Nielsen:

So many memories with Barry from meetings in the VVAW "offices" in the back of the New World Resource Center to Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies, stories and drunkenness at Quenchers, getting yelled at while doing security at IVAW's Winter Soldier, Homeless Veteran Standdowns, VVAW campouts, Milwaukee Brew Fest and so many more. Barry was an inspiration, a leader and a mentor as well as someone who could be infuriating once he got his mind stuck on something. One of a kind. He will be missed but never forgotten. Rest in power Barry.

John Ketwig:

What sad, terrible news! We all counted on Barry, as an organizer, speaker, and inspiration. He always answered his phone, and always had something important or insightful to offer. Most of all, I will miss him as simply a nice guy, and someone who dared to carry more than his share of the load. RIP Barry.

Marcus W Waller:

Barry was our Union Rep at the Post Office. I met him when I started in 86. I was immediately impressed with his savvy, determination and his need to help others. OMG he was determined. He needed to be of service. In any way form or fashion. His status as a Vietnam Vet was at once a privilege for me and was, it seemed to me, a haunting reminder of all the poisonous things our country and society could bring to its people. Yet Barry shined….he persevered and took his experiences and used them as a badge of courage….maybe even armor. He fought seemingly every day for the everyday man or woman at work. When I disclosed my HIV status at work his friendship never waivered, it in fact intensified. When he went home he was still in the trenches with his visits to schools and his continuous work with VVAW. He was an amazing force of nature. It was an honor to know, laugh and love him.

Peace Be With You All

Matt Muchowski:

Barry was a great activist and advocate for peace and veterans physical and mental health. He frequently joined our pickets with VA workers. He will be missed.

Joleen Kirschenman:

Barry always greeted me with a big smile and a big hug. I will miss those and just having him around. His work with anti-war veterans through the decades has cemented his legacy. So many memories. Rest in power, my friend.

Larry and Wendi Goldman:

We knew and were friends with Barry for many years. A great person that dedicated his entire life to fighting for poor and working people everywhere. You will truly be missed by many. Love you

Judith Ashton:

My memories of Barry begin in 1961 when I met Barry and Mark Hartford during high school. He quickly became a brother and member of my family. During high school we argued constantly about politics as Barry was a big Goldwater supporter. But then he went to Vietnam as a 19 year old second lieutenant. And then his nephew was killed in Vietnam and Barry came home.

Then everything changed. He became involved in the anti-war effort and recruiting and leading the VVAW chapter in our town of San Bernardino. One of the events I remember vividly was the guerrilla theater at local malls. Barry was arrested at one of those, of course.

As a teacher at a local community college, I was able to fly Barry from Chicago back to San Bernardino for speeches at my college. Several VVAW members participated with Barry.

Barry was very close to my parents. He and my mother Alice Ashton argued, laughed and loved each other. He was a special person to my father and to my sister Patty—he was a best friend.

Patty dated Barry in high school and has great stories to add to those days.

There are so many heartfelt memories listed here from VVAW and friends. I cry as I read them.

Barry was always a loving, thoughtful person. I wish I had seen him in more recent years. The last time I saw Barry was about 5 years ago, and we had dinner at his favorite Mexican restaurant in his neighborhood.

I will never forget Barry and his tremendous devotion for peace, to his fellow vets, and his work with VVAW.

He was and is an inspiration.

Rest in peace my friend

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Barry Romo Memories

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Ray Parrish:

Barry got me to my first chapter meeting in May 1983 where I met Roni. For the next 29 years she and I did veteran counseling and hosted many VVAW meetings. Barry made this work possible.

Barry gave me 40 years of love.

Marc Kitchel:

I met Barry and Mark Hartford in Riverside, California in the early 1970s. He was such a courageous, dedicated, skilled, tireless and powerful advocate and organizer for peace, justice, and veterans. RIP.

Kelly Dougherty:

Barry was instrumental in the founding and growth of Iraq Veterans Against the War. So many of our actions, from Winter Soldier to Operation First Casualty and more, were inspired by VVAW actions. Barry supported and encouraged us younger vets when we got home and felt all turned inside out and full of anger and grief and confused energy. He went through hell and because of it he did all he could to throw a wrench in the war machine. I miss him.

Shawna:

I felt like I didn't really belong in the anti-war movement and Barry quickly helped me feel included and taught me about survivor guilt back in 2010. He was so powerful and approachable, you felt like you knew him forever after just meeting him. I regret not having more time with him, and am so glad to see everyone else share stories of his life. I hope I can be half as good as him to people in movement.

Diane Stokes:

Rest in Power! Barry devoted his life to building the Anti-war Movement, We must carry on his work.

Wanda E Nieves:

I knew Barry from HS, we were close friends along with a group we used to hang out with, he was a great friend. I met with him in Chicago a few years ago and talked about our HS years, those were good memories. Wish I knew what happened in order for me to pass the word on to his classmates.

Karin and Fred Schein:

Let's all commit to keeping Barry's spirit alive by fighting for justice

Richard Stacewicz:

I saw Barry before I met him. I was standing at the corner of Jackson and LaSalle in Chicago near the Federal building waiting for the start of an anti-war rally to protest the commencement of Operation Desert Storm in January 1991. I noticed a guy crossing the street towards the rally when suddenly, a Chicago Police paddy wagon pulled up next to him. Three cops hopped out and within seconds had Barry face-down on the asphalt, handcuffed him and threw him in the back of the van. It all happened so quickly that no one had a chance to come to his assistance.

I didn't know who Barry was at the time. The next morning, I heard a report on our local NPR station about the previous evening's rally. During that brief report, they mentioned that there had been one arrest. Barry Romo of the VVAW had been arrested for assaulting a police officer. I realized that I had witnessed the arrest and the only assault I had seen was carried out by the police.

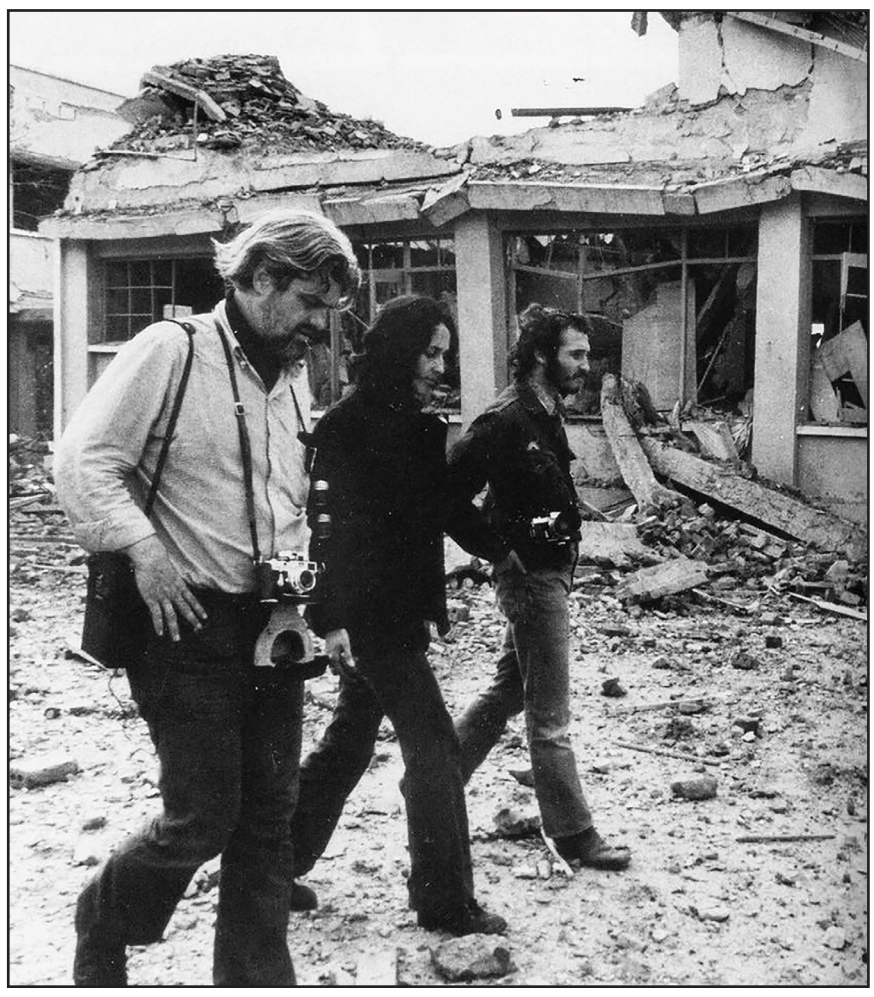
I looked up Barry's name in the phone book and called him to offer my assistance if he needed it since I had witnessed the arrest. He didn't answer so I left him a message on his answering machine with my contact information. He called the next day and thanked me but let me know that this was not his first arrest when trying to speak out and that charges would inevitably be dropped. We talked about the VVAW briefly and then hung up.

I was a graduate student in history with a specialization in US Foreign Policy and Imperialism/ Decolonization. I had heard of VVAW in my studies of the Vietnam War but found there was almost nothing written about the VVAW. I called Barry back and asked if I could interview him. This was the genesis of the book, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.* We spent a number of days together where Barry described his upbringing before the war, his service, and his transformation from an unthinking enlistee to an anti-war activist.

Barry then provided me with connections to members of the VVAW who then connected me with still others. Over the next two years, I traveled across the country interviewing members of VVAW. Barry and I often met during that time so I could get further information about specific events and meetings mentioned by other members. He was an invaluable resource. Barry also visited my classes to talk about the VVAW and he continued to speak out about the VVAW and against wars at numerous venues. At times, we would speak together at events. He was indefatigable and committed to his anti-war and anti-racist work throughout his life after returning from Vietnam. He'll be sorely missed.

Nadya M. Williams:

As an associate member of Veterans For Peace since March 2003, I always intersected with VVAW. Especially since VFP was founded in 1985 by veterans of the American War against SE Asia; and especially since my first demonstration against the Vietnam war was in 1963 at the Univ. of CA, Berkeley, as a 19-year-old sophomore. Though I never got the chance to meet Barry, he has always been a giant figure. We all "lived" his tireless work for justice and truth through the organization, actions, *The Veteran* newspaper and countless more efforts. What a loss to the world.



Michael Allen, Joan Baez, and Barry Romo in Hanoi, December 1972.

Barry Prindle:

Barry Romo was a selfless force of nature. Met him in Philly in '76, but didn't really get to know him until the 80's in Chicago. Never knew a more committed and heartfelt activist than him. We sometimes found ourselves at the same meeting, someone would say "Barry" and we'd both answer, Yes. So we took to calling each other, "The other Barry."

He was such a presence it's hard to wrap my mind around him being gone.

Presente Mr. Romo.

Tom Wilson:

Barry and the VVAW were important influences in my political journey in the dedication to oppose all imperialist wars, the war machine and the necessity of racism and brutality in search of global domination by our ruling class. Barry was friendly and warm to all comrades, not sectarian but also great at protecting people from provocateurs.

He was fun to be with and while struggling with demons was able to be a phenomenal leader and uniter. Rest in power and peace.

Derek Giffin:

Going from a combat zone in Iraq to a classroom in the span of 3 months made me feel like I was crazy. Barry brought me into the fold and taught me history was merely repeating. He was a mentor to all new IVAW members. I used to have him repeat stories of beating Nazis in 1972. Such a great man.

Debbie Bailey Alexander:

I remember the first time you came to our commune in Norfolk and you seemed impressed with a fireplace in all the bedrooms. That was so long ago! When VVAW marched with us during times of apartheid in South Africa I remember thinking how well protected we all felt with y'all marching in the Soweto brigade with us.

Barry, you were all our heroes not to mention some of the most badass Veterans ever! All the work you and others put in to change the system, counts and may your loved ones know what a great man you were. Peace be upon you and your family. I will hold those memories and more always close to my heart.

Frank Toner:

I did not know Barry well, although it seems I should have. We joined the Army and went to Vietnam. After returning to the US we protested the war. Like Barry I participated in the Winter Soldier Detroit hearings, marched on Washington at Dewey Canyon III, and spent much time organizing events and speaking against the war at High Schools.

I have always been amazed at the tremendous dedication to work he showed in working for peace and his dedication to justice for all.

Vince Nobile:

Sad to hear of Barry's passing. I met him in the early days at San Berdo Valley College as one of a number of us viet vets trying to piece together the best ways to oppose the war we had all participated in one way or

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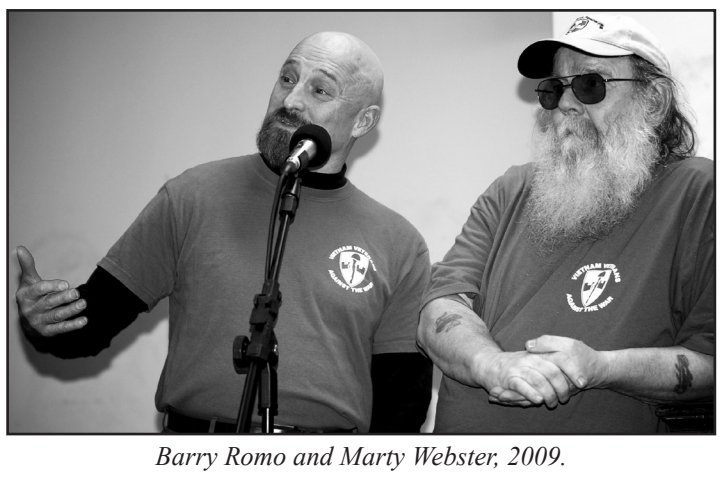
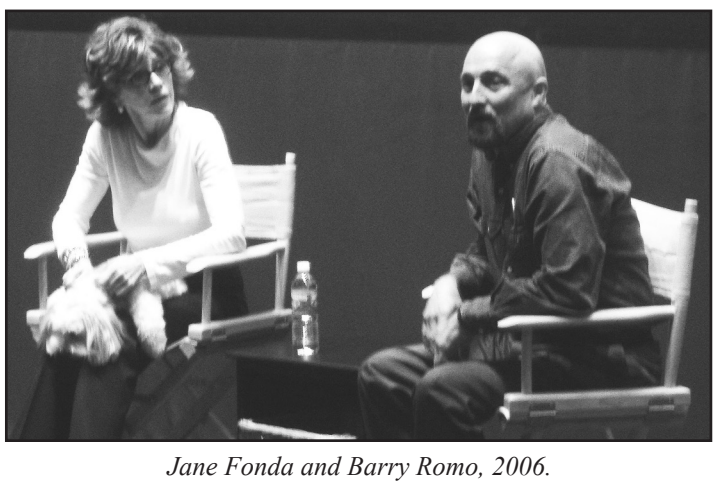
Bill Branson and Barry Romo on security at Iraq Veterans Against the War Winter Soldier event in 2008.



Barry Romo and Marty Webster, 2009.



Jane Fonda and Barry Romo, 2006.

Barry Romo Memories

continued from page 20

another. I'll remember him as a good man whose dedication to a just world can never be questioned by any who came to know him. RIP.

Johanna Buwalda:

Barry was one of the first people I met when I first arrived in the US as an immigrant looking for human rights communities. Many years later, Barry hired me for VVAW to provide counseling and complete mental health evaluations for veterans who wanted to apply for VA benefits or needed discharge upgrades. Together with Ray Parish we formed a team to support veterans. I will never forget the immense trust Barry put on me to do my job without ever requiring deliverables or reporting. He offered me the job at his favorite restaurant Taqueria Moran in Logan Square where we frequently met in the subsequent years. Barry will be missed by many. My condolences to his family and friends.

Muriel Hogan:

I was a member of VVAW in Milwaukee. Barry always came to our July 4 Campout. I remember him as a talented organizer, a deeply compassionate leader, and always the funniest guy at the party. Presente!

Mike Woloshin:

Barry's passing came as a shock. I had been in VVAW nearly as long as Barry, having joined the Wilbur Wright College Chapter in September 1971, after getting the "early out" from the US Navy on 1 March 1971.

I will never forget the New Years' Eve parties at Barry's place on Marshfield and the many good friends I met there. Many of them have added their memories of Barry above and sadly, too many of them have passed on, particularly Bill Davis, Dave Cline, Chris Molloy, Mike Sutton and too many others to list here.

We all took part in the Stand-Downs, demos, and remembrance of past victories, such as the 20th Anniversary of Dewey Canyon III, Dewey Canyon IV in Spring 1982, the dedication of the Wall on Veterans' Day of that year, Veterans' Day along the Chicago River and more.

Barry was one of those who made VVAW go, along with his fellow coordinators, Bill Davis and Dave Cline. It is my sincere hope that history will remember Barry and his accomplishments well. Barry now belongs to the history of the anti-war movement.

PRESENTE!

Al Kovnat:

Rest in peace. Barry made a difference and was a good man with a conscience.

Per Odman:

Barry,RIP.

Of all your untold brave, dedicated actions, your 1972 visit to Hanoi and you being bombed by Nixon's horrible B-52 Christmas Bombing, is exceptional.

Ken Sauvage:

I only knew Barry briefly and a long time ago, but he is not one who is easily forgotten. I am glad to have known him.

Marya Ryan:

The scope of Barry's life, love, and influence is inspiring. It's hard to believe he's gone but heartening to know how much good he left behind. Barry, you've earned your rest.

Ann Hirschman:

This has been so hard to write. Not just because I mourn Barry but because some of my memories involve innocent bystanders. So my favorite printable memory was at the Democratic convention in 1972. There had been threats against VVAW leaders so each had a bodyguard. I was guarding Barry. All went well til he had to take a leak and did not tell me that's where he was bound. So we went into the men's room. I assured the senator we startled that I was only there to guard Barry's ass and was ignoring the senator. When I asked Barry why he didn't take one of the male bodyguards he told me he forgot I was a girl. I loved Barry and miss him dearly. Who is remembered lives.

Kurt Jacobsen:

Got to know Barry through the likewise much lamented Dave Curry many years ago. Many encounters with this inspiring and unassuming man since, including a chance to film him recounting a few of his multitude of courageous activities. No stolen valor here. RIP, Barry.

John Crandell:

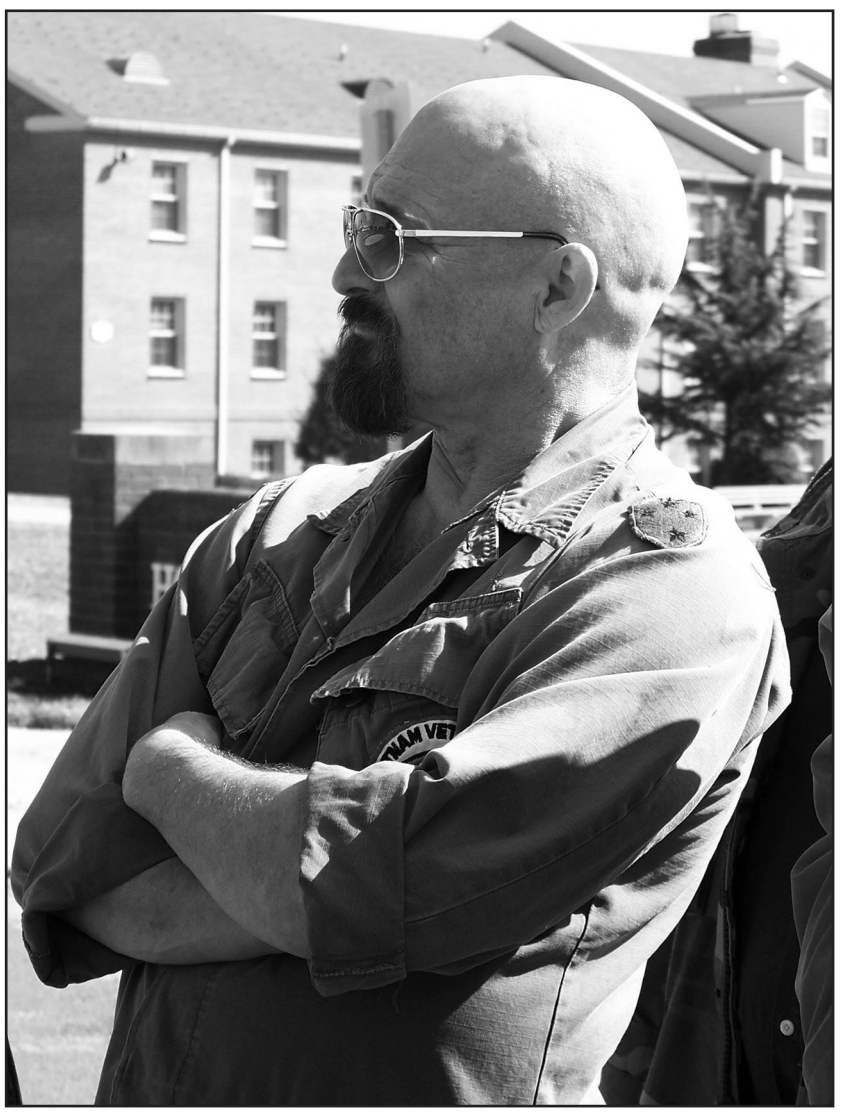
To try to assess the cumulative weight of a matter or a legend, you'd best know the dimensions of its components. Romo's name has long resounded amongst us. To read all of these accolades and remembrances as well as the extraordinary *Washington Post* obituary for Barry is quantum confirmation of an unceasing commitment to a cause. This, instead of potential hazard or harm in whatever career calculation. One did not know him, only of him—and feels confident in positing that he was and will remain the best of us all.

Frank Titus:

Gone too soon! RIP brother Barry.

Billy X Curmano:

I don't really have words to describe how much I will miss my dear friend and VVAW brother, Barry Romo. He was a natural born leader



Barry Romo at Iraq Veterans Against the War Winter Soldier event in 2008.

and my life has been enhanced by having known him. The accolades are true. I can only add I loved him as both a brother and an inspiration. I will keep him in my heart.

Ron Arm:

Barry was a friend and VVAW comrade-in-arms. We had differences in the end but still were able to connect. Those all fall aside with the respect I feel for him and his accomplishments on behalf of VVAW. Remember sleeping on his floor and kicking ass in the streets and on the mall.

Linda Cooper Berdayes:

I met Barry in 1971 when I worked with Bill Davis and others in organizing the Columbus VVAW chapter. I remember him as a good man with a dedicated heart. While I lost touch over the years, I still followed his writings in *The Veteran* and admired his dedication so much. He was a pivotal person in my life and through him and others in VVAW, my life direction changed forever.

Edward Sonny Williams:

Barry was a standup comrade in VVAW and an inspiration to me and all the former members of Cincinnati VVAW.

Paul Meuse:

I'm shocked, and saddened to hear. I first met Barry before, or at the demonstration in the summer of 1974. Above all Barry was a gentleman who cared about the truth, and making positive changes. He is now with Walter Klim,and all others.

Carol Pazera:

I am heartbroken to hear of Barry's passing. I met Barry in the 1980's when I was involved in Nicaraguan solidarity work. It was a thrill to learn from each other. I am so grateful for Barry's love and friendship. There is no one like him, and I will never forget him.

Michael T. McPhearson:

I just saw that Barry died.

I don't know what to say. I wish I had seen him one more time. I appreciate his work, the history he helped make, and the road he helped pave for me as a veteran who can be critical of US wars. I know I follow the path of great veterans before me. He helped make my journey easier.

He was a giant among us. We carry on in his memory and for what is just.

We miss him. The world misses him.

Bill Veres:

RIP Barry. I was born in San Bernardino, in 1946. I went in the Army Aug 1964. Flight training at Ft. Rucker, then Germany. Went to the 1st Air Cavalry, Vietnam in 1966. I flew the ov-1 Mohawk. I did six years and got out as they were sending me back to Vietnam. I'm 80% now from that damn Agent Orange. I watched Vietnam in HD. Thanks for your service, Brother.

To sign the Barry Romo Memorial Guestbook, go to www.vvaw.org/barryromoguestbook/

Roberto Clack, Kyle Copeland (Barry's son), Aaron Hughes, and Barry Romo at Barry's favorite neighborhood restaurant, Taqueria Moran, 2024.

RIP Barry Romo

John Lindquist

I've known Barry Romo since April 1971. We met at Dewey Canyon III. He was one of those "radical" California veterans. I was on Operation Dewey Canyon, which started on Jan. 27, 1969. The 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, went into the A Shau Valley and parts of Laos. During DC III, I was "drafted" into being Wisconsin Regional Coordinator. I continued to see Barry at VVAW national meetings.

When VVAW declared "War on the VA," Wisconsin was heavily involved. I really got to know Barry better. He was my friend, a fellow warrior, and a good leader.

I would have been proud to have him as my platoon commander. He would have had to enlist in the Marines, but he had more sense than that! Whether working on the 1972 anti-Nixon re-election demo in Miami, the Gainesville 8 trial, the work on Post Vietnam Syndrome (PVS), or the formation of the Vets Centers, Barry gave his all.

In his work on the Agent Orange struggle, the push to normalize relations with Vietnam, building libraries in Vietnam, or his Post Office Union, Barry always gave 110%.

I will miss you and always remember you. I'll especially remember all the times you came to the VVAW Campouts in Wisconsin.

Semper Fidelis.

John Lindquist is a long-time VVAW member from Milwaukee, now living in England.

Bill Davis, Barry Romo, & John Lindquist.

Barry, Tricky Dick, & Me

W. D. Ehrhart

One of the most infuriating aspects of Gerald "I Am the Only President Ever Elected by Just One Single Congressional District" Ford's pardon of Richard "I Am Not a Crook" Nixon was that I never got to see the Dick behind bars. Not even just long enough for a photo op.

And as if to rub salt in the wound, the United States Postal Service even honored King Richard the Milhous with his very own postage stamp:

Will you look at that face? He's almost smiling, like he's thinking, "Nyah, nyah, I beat the rap, kept my pension and all that good stuff, and now I even have a stamp."

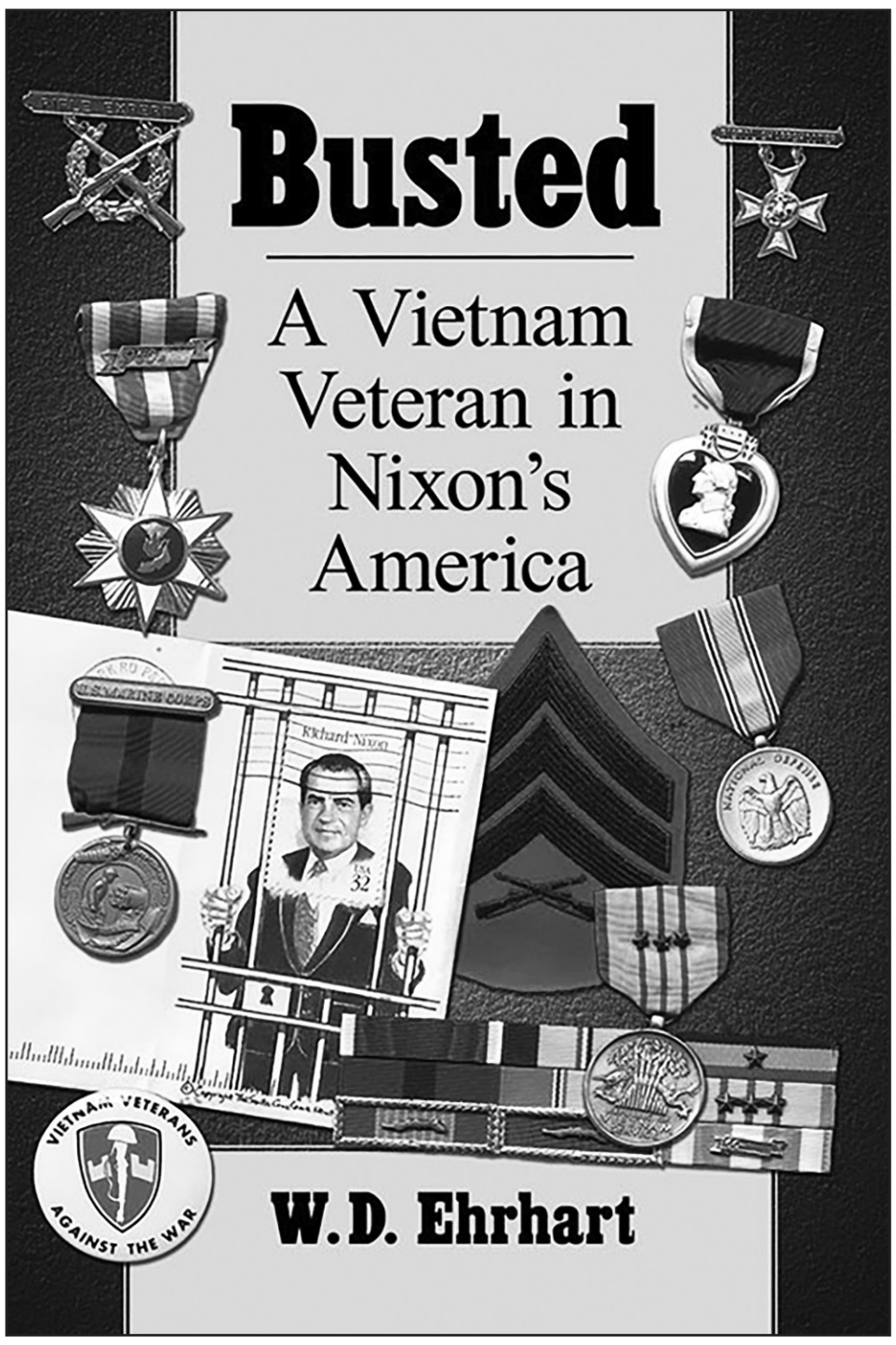
But I finally got at least a small measure of satisfaction when Barry Romo fulfilled my fond wish to see that miserable SOB behind bars. I don't even remember what Barry had written to me about—this had to be nearly thirty years ago—but his letter came in an envelope with Nixon behind bars.

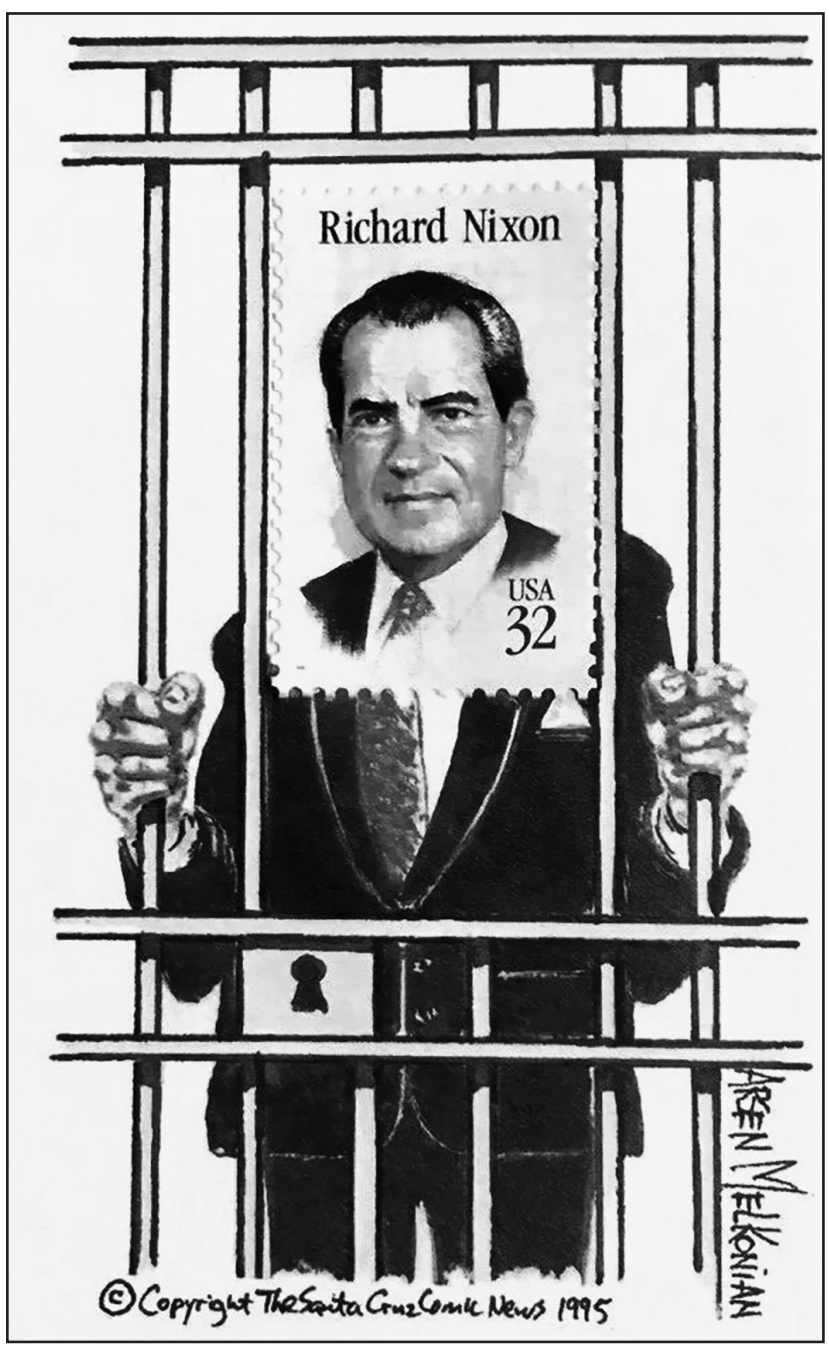
I kept that image tacked to my bulletin board for several decades. I looked at it multiple times a day, and every time I looked at it, I would think of Barry and smile. He must have sensed just how disappointed I'd been when Tricky Dicky from Yorba Linda got a "Get Out of Jail Free" card from the guy who maybe took one-too-many blows to the head while playing football at the University of Michigan.

I have no idea why I held onto that envelope all those years; maybe it was just good karma or good luck or the cosmos granting me one of my fondest wishes. Whatever it was, I was finally able to "go public" with Nixon Behind Bars when McFarland & Company agreed to include the image on the cover of their 2021 reissue of *Busted: A Vietnam Veteran in Nixon's America*.

So thank you, Barry, for allowing me the last laugh on the SOB who had promised Peace With Honor but only gave us and the Vietnamese more death and destruction and misery. And thank you, Barry, for all you did for Vietnam Veterans Against the War, for the cause of Peace and Justice, and for the life you lived: Barry Romo, 1947-2024.

W. D. Ehrhart is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.





Twenty-Year-Old Destroyerman

"Somerset" Meece

Suppose you're stationed on a warship in the United States Navy, and your ship is ordered to go halfway around the world to anchor offshore of a sovereign nation and shoot five-inch diameter explosive bullets at people hiding under the trees. In that case, there's nothing you can do or say about that. You have to go with it. If you're stationed on a destroyer, you're expected to destroy on demand. You're not supposed to care about the background of victims you don't know and against whom you don't have the slightest resentment.

If you dare to ask, "Why are we killing those people and ruining their stuff," you'll only get the propaganda lie, "Because they're ruthless, monolithic commies and they want our stuff and our women too."

So they want our sex partners? As a twenty-year-old, I didn't like that. Damn those commies. They deserve what we give 'em.

"It's your job, you signed-up for it. You should'a known."

"How was I supposed to get good information? The newspapers all said that this was a grand show and just a low-energy, military conflict. This feels like wholesale slaughter."

If you were a recent teenager from a down-state Illinois farm county, you had never learned that big shots secretly own politicians who carry out their imbecilic instructions in the public forum. No way you could have found out that the Vietnam-American War was killing peasants just for better business. You were a peasant yourself. It took all your time to earn corporate chump change so you could look better, get a car, and get dates with attractive members of the opposite sex. Just because you were young.

Mostly, you wanted to get the hell out of down-state Illinois. You wanted to see the world and learn a trade so you could make a living when you finished your required four-year enlistment in the Navy. In 1962, if you didn't enlist in the military, you got drafted by the Army for two years and shot people in the jungle. If you lasted that long, you had to dwell in a combat zone for a year. You didn't have to serve for four years like us enlistees.

So I signed up for Fleet Sonar School and in 1964, found myself anchored offshore of a fishing village in Vietnam, which had thatched huts and outrigger canoes on the beach. High hills, covered in the dark green rainforest, rose behind the beach. So there I was anyway, shooting at people in the jungle. But this was safer than doing it in the Army.

My destroyer was providing "gunfire support" for ground forces who were killing sovereign Vietnamese people who did not want a surrogate of the previous French commercial power telling them what empire to serve.

It felt shameful and un-American. It was not John Wayne movie material. We were powerful invaders. They offered no threat to me or my ship. Those "commies" had no artillery fighter jets nor destroyers that could reach us that far out. We blasted shots at them every fifteen minutes, night and day, to kill and to harass their sleep. We had clean sheets and delicious meals from our shiny shipboard galley. We didn't sleep too well with five-inch guns banging the steel hull like two-ton sledge hammers all night long, but we got used to it.

It was shameful, so we ignored it. We did not say a word about this horrendous action in which we participated. Even if we were not Gunner's Mates who fired the long guns at people too far away to see, we crewed the ship that shot them.

Just as I state in the foreword to my Vietnam naval novel, *Tin Can*, we knew that the UCMJ, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (Injustice, is what we called it), Article 94, said that a person found guilty of sedition "shall be punished by death..." We dared not say that invasive long-range killing was stupid and immoral. Talking like that would be sedition. Who voices negative opinions under a Damoclean sword? We did our duty and stuffed our guilt down deep.

Article 85 of the aforementioned illustrious UCMJ states that if you can't stand some atrocity that your outfit is committing with full military vigor, you cannot excuse yourself and depart the scene because that would be a mutiny, and "Any person who commits mutiny in time of war shall be..." Guess what? "...punished by death." Yep, there they go again, waving that good old military "justice" around like a cat o' nine tails.

Wait a minute; democratic America isn't that fascistic, surely. But, as some Veterans have been heard to say, "We were defending democracy, not practicing it."

A sailor could indeed go over his commander's head and lodge a complaint with a bigger boss. However, the Commander In Chief (Lyndon B. Johnson was the Top Dog then, the President of the whole country) wanted those atrocities to be committed. Thus, any complaint got sunk before it left the Division, and the complainer would be persecuted to hell for the rest of their military term and probably kicked out with a deplorable Dishonorable Discharge. (They may have deserved a Peace Medal. The Hippies were right. It was an unjust war.)

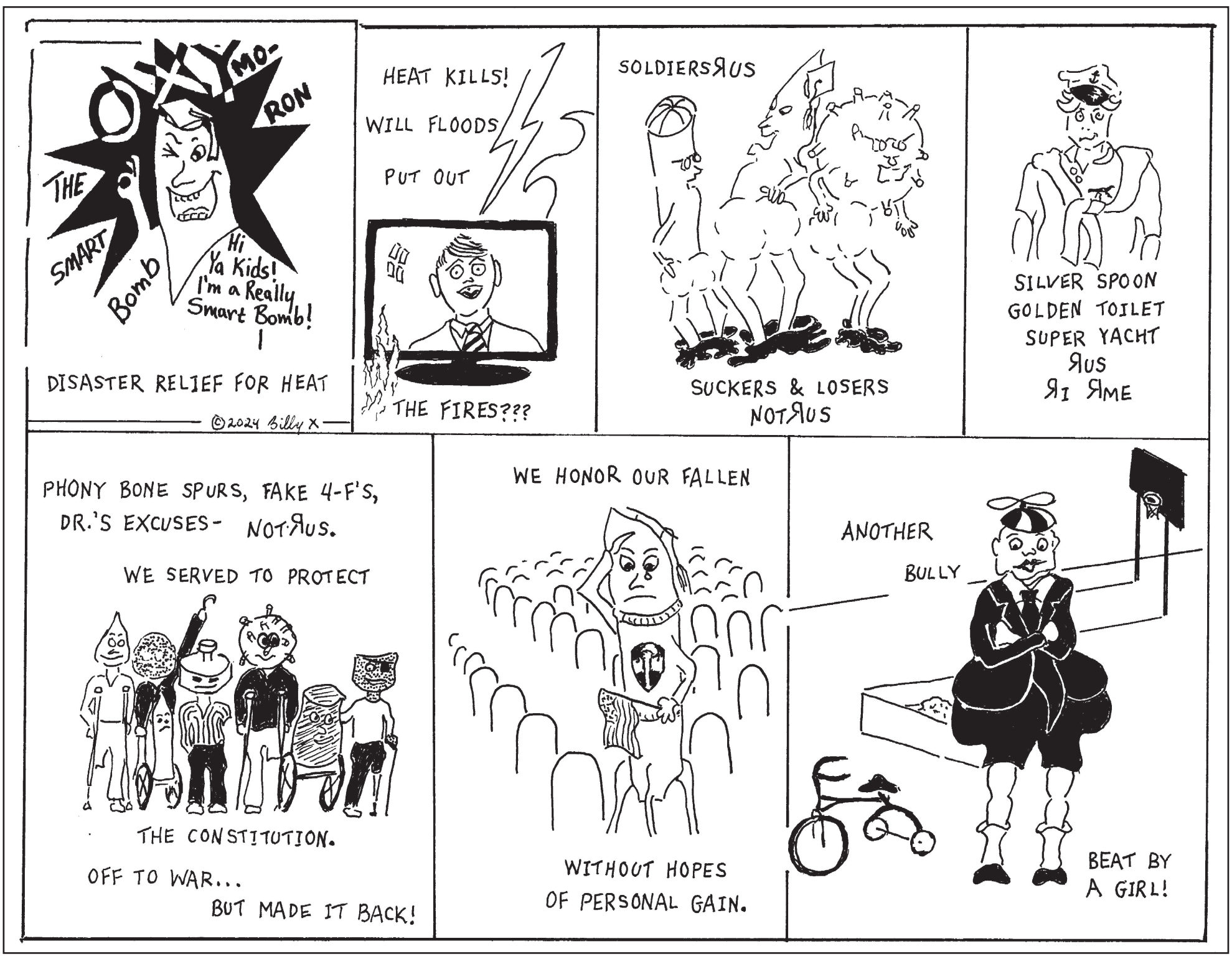
When I got out, I had an alcohol dependence, as have many others with war experience. It caused me to impose shameful experiences upon myself many times and long ago. Shame begat shame in a backlash for what I'd done to others in wartime. Luckily, I kicked that bad habit three decades ago and now enjoy doing good things, like advising young men not to go to war unless an invader comes here and barges over our shoreline. Offense is the worst kind of defense. Defense means staying at home and only fighting invaders. We were invaders.

Looking back, I regret my youthful naivety, but even if naivety makes one vulnerable for a while, it's still fine to be an innocent good guy. A great institution like the US Navy must not exploit innocence. I wasn't asked like they do in the movies if I wanted to "volunteer" to kill people for their political situations. I wasn't allowed to claim a "conscientious objector" status because I wasn't a member of any religious sect that was officially recognized as being anti-killing to the cores of their souls like the Quakers are known to be. I am a peace-and-life-lover now just by being a casual Christian.

I now love those who went to prison or to another country to avoid killing for the wrong reasons. Killing hurts the killer more. They have to live with what they've done while their victims are fine in heaven, pointing down at them, smiling, and shaking their heads.

It takes what it takes to learn that peace is a bliss that everyone deserves and in which great things and good living are possible and probable.

Somerset Meece, Sonar Technician Third Class, served on the USS Edwards, DD950 from 1964 to 1966. His novel "Tin Can," about his destroyer's Tonkin Gulf Incident, is at Amazon.com



Comments or suggestions? Contact Billy at billyx.net@gmail.com or visit him online at www.billyx.net.

THE VETERAN
SECTION D
Volume 54, Number 1 Spring 2024

Barry Romo: Friend, Comrade, Brother

Joe Miller

Most of us have a few individuals who stand out in our lives as people who have influenced us in some way. For me, one of those people was my friend, my comrade, Barry Romo.

We lost Barry this year but have not lost his memory and how he changed and challenged us. Let me step back a bit…

It took me a while to join VVAW. I am not a combat veteran and did not feel I had any real claim. I never served "in-country." However, I received the Vietnam Service Medal from my time on board the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14) for two WESTPAC cruises, 1964-65 and 1965-66.

Despite this, Bart Savage, who was then organizing a VVAW chapter in Chicago, invited me to join in 1970. Given my work and family obligations, I was as active as I could be from then to early 1972. Meetings at the Wobbly Hall or Bart's apartment. Local demonstrations in the city or outside the base at Great Lakes. I participated whenever possible.

We moved away from Chicago in May 1972. This was just before Barry and the VVAW National Office moved to Chicago. I never got the chance to meet him then. I had no direct contact with VVAW for the next fifteen years as I pursued graduate school and temporary teaching jobs, including four years in Australia.

Soon after my return to the US, the "Welcome Home Parade for Vietnam Veterans" was to take place in Chicago in 1986. I learned that VVAW would participate and decided to join their contingent. I learned about someone named Barry Romo, who was a vocal leader of VVAW. I wanted to reconnect, to get political again in Reagan's America, especially in relation to US aggression in Central America—an issue I was very active on while living in Australia.

My 70-year-old aunt, an Army veteran from 1945-55, wanted to join me. We arrived too late to find the VVAW marchers but joined the parade anyway. It would take another year to make the connection, as I took teaching jobs wherever I could.

In the summer of 1987, I was back in the Chicago area, preparing to move to a new job at the University of Northern Iowa. I stayed at my folks' place and spent some time with my kids before the move.

The 20th Anniversary of VVAW was coming up on June 13th, with a ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fountain on Wacker Drive, followed by a celebration at Bethany United Church on Chicago's Northside. I was looking forward to finally reconnecting with VVAW more directly. I invited my fifteen-year-old son to join me. He was already a fan of Country Joe, who would be there.

During the ceremony, I got to meet Barry and many other VVAW members I had never met during my early years with the organization. The speeches were all very powerful, and I felt I found my political "home" once again. My son and I also decided to attend the event at the church, where we got to chat with Barry a little more and meet his little daughter, Jessi. My son got an album signed by Country Joe. I reconnected with Ray Parrish, whom I had known as a student activist at the University of Illinois in the late 1970s. This began a nearly forty-year connection with VVAW and Barry Romo.

The job in Iowa did not work out, and I ended up back in Champaign, Illinois, working as a copy editor for the University of Illinois Press. By a strange twist of fate (this has happened many times in my life), I was asked to take up the academic advisor position in political science at the University in early 1989.

I now lived closer to Chicago and the VVAW National Office. My contacts with Barry grew more regular. VVAW was very involved with the efforts to remove US bases from the Philippines, and I would travel up to Chicago to join Barry in community meetings with Filipino activists. Political activists in Champaign-Urbana also brought Barry down to hold public discussions on the issue.

Barry Romo, Le Ly Hayslip, and Joe Miller at the UI, November 1993.

This became a regular activity, bringing Barry to C-U to discuss or lecture on whatever political issue was "hot" at the time. I also invited him to join my classes on the political history of the Vietnam War and Hollywood treatments of that war. He did this every semester until I retired in 2013.

Barry developed a close political and social relationship with local activists, and we would invite him and other VVAW members like Bill Branson to join us for political discussions, training in security for demonstrations, and just social gatherings where Barry and VVAW became a regular part of the scene in Champaign-Urbana. We eventually organized a VVAW chapter there, thanks to his support and regular contact.

On a more personal level, Barry and I became close friends. He would stay in my flat when he came to Champaign. My family came to know him….my daughter and granddaughter called him "Uncle Barry." When I was up in the Chicago area, visiting my mom and dad, Barry would come over and chat with them. He had a deep connection with my dad, as a survivor of the Battle of the Bulge. My mom appreciated Barry as a close family friend, though she was never a fan of his facial hair—she had a thing about that. Barry attended their wakes and funerals in 2010 and 2013.

My last real discussion with Barry followed the VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago in 2023. He was becoming frail, but we sat together and chatted for some time. I will carry that memory for the rest of my life.

Barry could be difficult and ultra-argumentative at times. But, in the end, I will always appreciate his breadth of knowledge, kindness, devotion to friends, and deep commitment to struggles for social justice anywhere and everywhere. He educated hundreds, perhaps thousands, of my students. Many of them became activists or educators. His shadow is a long one across this country and even overseas.

Barry Romo was my friend, a comrade, and most of all, my brother in struggle!

Joe Miller is a board member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Joe Miller at Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

Barry Romo: Man of the People

Kurt Hilgendorf

Remarks from Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

Barry Romo was a man of the people, and anybody here who knew him—you know what that means. He loved people, and he loved them deeply, and you saw it anytime he was walking in the neighborhood. He would say hello to every random person he walked past. It was always said most humbly and lovingly. He lived his life that way. Not only was Barry about love, he was about intersectionality before that was even a word.

I met Barry as a student in Joe Miller's class. When he talked about the issue of going to fight a war, he was clear that the same forces held women down at home. That's why you had to fight for reproductive healthcare, why you had to fight for union rights, why you had to ensure that people had decent jobs, and why people had to have housing. It didn't matter what the issue was; Barry understood it and connected it to everything else.

Barry would come to my class when I was teaching at John Hope HS in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. He would talk to the students about the issues of how the military weaponized racism to divide people. He spoke about how the military weaponizes misogyny to divide people. He was clear that the same forces at play in Vietnam, Iraq, Grenada, or wherever there was a military action were in play at home.

He was marching in all of those pictures in his home museum because he joined teachers, clinicians, and paraprofessionals on strike multiple times over multiple days when the Chicago Teachers Union was out advocating for the schools Chicago's students and their families deserve. He understood all of that and was with us anytime that it was a war issue, a labor issue, a schools issue—it did not matter. Barry was there because he loved people.

I'm gonna miss him deeply. I know that all the folks here will, too. I want to appreciate and honor his legacy because there aren't many like him. Thank you, Barry.

Kurt Hilgendorf is the special assistant to the president at the Chicago Teachers Union.

Kurt Hilgendorf at Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

May Day, May Day - 2024

Forty nine years ago yesterday I'd sat up all night, while Saigon fell
listening to Beethoven's Third, on repeat (repeatedly)
Firestorms, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards
twelve months going forward, plus a fall election
The approach of a half-century anniversary - 2025
and the idea of a dictator-in-chief Putin Oval Office place
Of what once was a democracy
summons images that only Hieronymus Bosch would have created
None the worse than what native peoples experienced
following Plymouth Rock, following March 8th, 1965 at Da Nang
Opus 55, in E flat major and a summer's heat ahead

2nd day of May - 2024

Barry Romo is gone, left our world yesterday

—John Crandell

Night Ambush

Soon after dark his patrol returned to the place
Where they had seen bicycle tracks beside the rice paddy.
Quietly they took their positions in a ditch,
Smoked cigarettes and nervously waited
In silence
In the black moonless night.

Tonight, there would be no sleep.
Muffled words were passed down the line
Making certain all stayed alert.
Solomon would whisper to him, "Are you awake?"
Then he would turn and whisper,
"Hollis, you still there?"

He heard the hushed voice of the radio operator
Talking between squelches to the command post,
While he listened to the unremitting songs
Of frogs and crickets from the nearby forest,
And to the mosquitoes buzzing around his ears.
At some point he guessed it was afternoon back home.

He imagined a cold day but his mother
Would be behind the house, tending her garden.
It was where she went for solace.
He was surprised how clearly he could see her there,
Kneeling in front of the bare brown
Of her December flowerbeds.

He pictured her weeding around the plants,
And getting the earth ready for spring,
She would be dressed in her old blue canvas winter coat,
A pair of patched red woolen pants, worn-out tennis shoes,
A fuzzy wool cap that one of her boys had left behind,
And work gloves too big for her hands.

She loved all flowers but favored her perennials.
Spring would bring Shasta daisies, baby's breath,
Day lilies, coreopsis and foxglove.
Rows of delicate coral-bells would line the brick walk,
And climbing the trellis against the solid redwood fence
Were lemon yellow roses and blue-purple clematis.

In a few months the backyard would be full of life.
He imagined his father arriving home from the office,
Tired from the day's work and from the pain in his leg.
He might sit on the low wall of the patio for a moment,
Watching her work
In the thin winter sunlight.

—Jim Richardson
1/6, 196 Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, 1970-71

Draftee

I didn’t give a shit about rifles, or flags,
or 4th of Julys, or patriotic parades.

I was into drive-in movies, and cruising
along Whittier Boulevard in my hopped-up

56' Chevy for excitement. I was a Patriot
of Love, of my sixteen-year-old wife,

and my single mother, and my friends
punching in and out of dead-end jobs.

I couldn’t tell a mortar from an RPG,
an AK from an M-16, a guerilla from

a gorilla, or a commie from a homie.
I loved my life, as small as it was, and

for as little as I knew of death. I heard
about those who believed War was All,

one's “ultimate” sacrifice and duty.
They tried to tell me “what War was

was like”, but it was never like that
for me. I felt no thrill in the kill, and

vomited the first time I saw what a
500-pound bomb does to a body.

No, I was done with War long before
War was done with me. I died and

came back to life and have lived all
of my nine cat's lives. One was lived

out in firefights and night patrols
where the sky fell with bullets, shrapnel,

and flesh. It's the one I keep waking to,
and the one I will forever mourn.

—rg cantalupo

Barry Romo: He Lived For Us

Geoffrey Millard

Remarks from Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

Geoffrey Millard at Barry Romo Memorial Day event in Chicago, May 27, 2024.

The first time I met Barry Romo, he cussed me out. True story. Here I was, a fresh from Iraq disillusioned war vet who couldn't understand why after decades, he held on to the same beef from fucking 1972.

As IVAW turns 20, I understand him a bit more than I did in those days. All I saw then was a man whom I'd read about in books and idolized, calling me a motherfucker.

I fell in love with Barry that day. Not because he cussed me out but because by the end of the day, he was drunkenly hugging me and telling me how much he admired me. It was that a cussing out didn't mean he didn't care or respect me. He didn't toss me out, nor did I him.

In the days that followed, I went to his apartment, and it was like walking through a museum. He showed me pictures, news articles, books, and films (mostly VHS tapes) while he poetically reminisced for hours.

At one point, while we sat at his dining room table, he stared down at the table, ran his hand softly across its dust-covered mess, and said, in almost a remorseful tone, "This was the VVAW office for a few of the lean years."

Lean years, he called them—the time when the world had moved on from Vietnam, having replaced real heroes like Dave Cline and Barry Romo with fictional portrayals of the war.

He talked to me about the times he wanted to give it all up, but he couldn't. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't walk away from VVAW.

He held on despite decades of dwindling numbers and more than their share of funerals.

He held on for us. He knew that, and I hope he also knew that we were grateful then and remain grateful today.

I was so lost in the years after my war. Deeply traumatized from the war, as much as don't ask, don't tell. Those first few years after Iraq were just survival for me, and it's because of Iraq Veterans Against the War that I somehow made it through. It's because of VVAW that there was ever an IVAW. It's because of Vietnam Veterans Against the War that we had guiding hands in those early hard years of coming home and trying to end our war. They were always there guiding us in our protest, in our VA claims process, and in trying to have a life somehow after the war ended.

There's a handful of Vietnam vets without whom IVAW would never have existed. Barry Romo was one of those Vietnam veterans.

I remember the night the Winter Soldier II testimony ended, and his work as security had one more gig. He stood watch as we let out some steam in a small private performance from Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine. He never stopped looking out for us. From Winter Soldier to the NATO March, he watched over us.

There's this song about touching a name on the wall and a lyric that goes.

"Some folks say they all died for nothing but I can't completely agree, cuz this brother here he didn't die for no country he died for me."

That lyric haunts many who understand what those words mean, but when I think of Barry Romo, he didn't live for no country; he lived for me… for us.

He lived through the war and escorting his own nephew's body home so that he could hug us when our family came home in flag draped coffins.

He lived through the, let's face it, completely insane heyday of VVAW so that he could point us in the right direction when IVAW was learning to crawl.

He lived through fights with the VA over Agent Orange and nightmares of the war so that he could recognize the burn pits that fueled our nightmares, helping us understand and then fight for our VA benefits.

He lived through the funerals of comrades so that he could hold us when ours were laid to rest.

He lived through the lean years of VVAW being but a mailing list on his dining room table so that IVAW could open an office in a closet.

He lived for us…

I know that the rest of his personal life suffered because he gave so much to us; I am eternally grateful and deeply sorry for that.

Thank you, Barry Romo, for living for me. Rest now, old friend. Your watch has ended, and ours continues.

Geoffrey Millard is an Iraq War veteran and early organizer with Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Memories of Barry Romo

Carl Nyberg

I first encountered Barry Romo in 1997, at the 30th anniversary of VVAW. I was recently discharged from the Navy (1996) and working for the US Campaign to Ban Landmines out of the Illinois Peace Action office. Kevin Martin, Illinois Peace Action's executive director, encouraged me to attend to network with veterans sympathetic to the goal of banning landmines. The 30th anniversary was at UE Hall and was full of energy. People discussed various memories connected to military service and activism. It was clear Barry Romo was a particularly respected figure whom I got to know more at parties and events.

Because I was speaking on landmines and Barry was speaking on the Vietnam War, we were sometimes booked to speak at the same place. Barry would make sure to add details about the horrors of landmines to his presentations. He once criticized me (privately) for being too much policy and not enough visceral stuff.

Barry's home was like a library or even a museum. Barry collected books and was quite well-read on many topics related to the Vietnam War, especially US history. It was important to him to highlight African Americans' role in various struggles for social progress.

When I worked in DC (2001-02), I sent Barry a letter encouraging him to run for US House. I thought Barry would be good at listening to the people who needed to be listened to and had many qualities of a good candidate: charisma, confidence, and an ability to nurture several one-on-one relationships. Barry never mentioned the letter, but I think he was glad to be asked to run.

At one point Barry invited me for breakfast at his place. He discussed the US Army's use of torture in Vietnam. He also talked about the Army teaching torture resistance when it was understood that waterboarding and other torture techniques would be used against the Vietnamese.

Barry was upset with Richard M. Daley for removing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial created when Jane Byrne was Mayor of Chicago. It was removed as part of redoing Wacker Drive. The City of Chicago claimed it would be replaced, but it wasn't. Barry was convinced Richard M. Daley was trying to erase Jane Byrne's legacy.

I saw Barry tell the story of bringing his nephew's body home from Vietnam at public ceremonies or as a fellow speaker (like when Joan Davis invited us to speak at York HS) multiple times. Barry was so committed to making people understand the Vietnam War was wrong that he would tell that story to young people as many times as he was asked. Eventually, I came to see the story not only as sad for the immediate tragedy of a man who shouldn't have been in Vietnam dying, but Barry was reliving it so many times for a world that was missing the message. Barry's storytelling moved the audience, but the larger society was indifferent. Pointless cruelty would continue because—that's what we're still wrestling with.

I last saw Barry at Aaron Hughes' home on Veterans Day 2023. He exuded warmth and gladness to connect with the people there.

Carl Nyberg is a Navy veteran who lives in Chicago. In 1997 he worked for the US Campaign to Ban Landmines.

H. Bruce Franklin: A Personal Farewell to an American Hero

W. D. Ehrhart

Only recently did I learn that H. Bruce Franklin, the prolific scholar, cultural historian, and passionate teacher, died in mid-May. Aside from a June 7th obituary in the *New York Times* and brief mentions on a couple of left-progressive websites, Franklin's death went almost unnoticed by both mainstream and progressive media.

The whole world paid homage when Daniel Ellsberg died eleven months earlier because Ellsberg—by stealing and revealing the infamous Pentagon Papers—had become famous: front-page, top-of-the-fold headline news for months and even years. But in his own way, Bruce Franklin was equally committed to truth-telling and exposing the lies, frauds, and crimes committed constantly by those in power in and out of government.

A former navigator on Strategic Air Command bombers, Franklin paid a price for his dedication to holding accountable—or at least trying to hold accountable—the power brokers who manage to pass themselves off as honorable people. During the Vietnam War, for engaging in very public anti-war activism, he became the first tenured Stanford University professor ever fired. He was blacklisted from teaching for several years.

I first met Franklin in 1981 at the Newark Public Library Book Fair. He already knew who I was, which startled me because that's a rare occurrence even now and was unheard of back then. However, I was to learn that he paid a lot of attention to Vietnam War literature. He was then teaching at Rutgers University—Newark, where he was to spend the rest of his academic career, and had begun teaching a course called "The US & Vietnam."

Over the next two decades, he regularly taught my book *Passing Time: Memoir of a Vietnam Veteran Against the War* and would have me come and talk to his students every year. He once wrote:

"Among the hundreds of authors whose works I have assigned in dozens of courses at American public and private universities since 1961, I have never seen one have the same impact as W. D. Ehrhart. I have not even heard about any other author having the kind of effect I have witnessed."

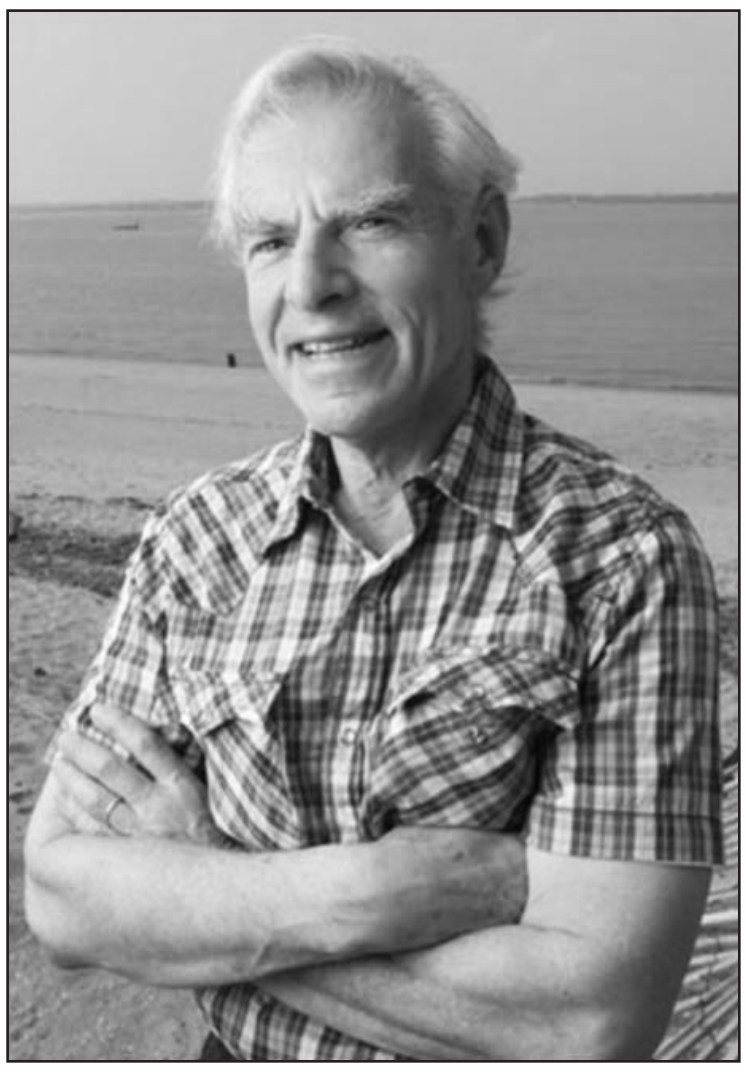
He was always incredibly supportive of my writing, including a healthy sampling of my work in his edited anthology, *The Vietnam War in American Stories, Songs, and Poems*. He included "Making the Children Behave" in *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*. His powerful *M.I.A., or Mythmaking in America*, a thorough debunking of the US government-generated lie that the Vietnamese were holding hundreds of living American prisoners decades after the war had ended, contains only one poem: my own "POW/MIA," which he used as an epilogue. He also wrote a wonderfully generous foreword to the University of Massachusetts Press edition of *Busted: A Vietnam Veteran in Nixon's America*.

But his interests were not limited to the American War in Vietnam. His early scholarship began with his doctoral work on Herman Melville, which ultimately became *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology*. I used to teach Melville's Billy Budd to high school students.

Franklin gave me an essay he'd written about the novel that completely altered my understanding of the book, arguing convincingly that while the background of the action in the novel is the British navy mutinies at Spithead and Nore, Melville is actually offering a condemnation of the American Empire being created out of the Spanish-American and Filipino-American Wars.

Franklin also became a recognized expert on—and advocate for—incarcerated convicts and prison literature, publishing three books on the subject: *American Prisoners and Ex-prisoners: An Annotated Bibliography of Published Works, 1798-1981*; *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*; and *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America.*

In addition, he was a huge fan of science fiction and did much to convince the academic world that the genre was worthy of serious consideration. Moreover, his study *War Stars: The Superweapon in the American Imagination* demonstrates how 19th—and 20th-century science fiction helped to shape the beliefs and



subsequent policies and decisions of powerful Americans, including multiple presidents.

In addition to all this, he was an avid recreational fisherman and environmentalist. His book *The Most Important Fish in the Sea: Menhaden and America* led to the introduction of two nature conservation bills in Congress and persuaded the Department of Commerce to take action to protect menhaden.

While accomplishing all of this, he taught full-time at Rutgers—Newark from 1975 until his retirement in 2015. That particular Rutgers campus is largely populated by working-class students, which was a perfect fit for Franklin since he himself came from a working-class family and had worked as a young man as a photography batch worker, an upholsterer, and a tugboat deckhand. I have encountered several former Franklin students over the years who say that he transformed their lives for the better.

After Franklin's retirement, he and his wife moved to California to be closer to their children, so I had not seen him for a decade. But we stayed in touch. When Jane died in 2023, after 58 years of marriage, I sent him a letter of condolence and support. I knew he was not in good shape because one of his daughters answered my letter, saying that Bruce could no longer reply to correspondence. He was 90 years old when he died, so the news of his death was not in itself surprising.

But it is deeply disappointing that his passing should be so little noted, not only by mainstream media but also by outlets that should revere and honor him. H. Bruce Franklin was and is an American treasure, and those of us who care about the truth need to remember him and find renewed inspiration from his life.

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W. D. Ehrhart received the Purple Heart Medal and the Navy Combat Action Ribbon for his service in Vietnam. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wales at Swansea. His most recent book is What We Can and Can't Afford: Essays on Vietnam, Patriotism, and American Life (McFarland, 2023).

Purple Heart? Silver Star?

One glance at those still frame images
forced one to sit back. Way back.
It all is - as if the spirit of Frank Capra
has gone over to the dark side.
Coursing one inch to the right
a bullet fired by a twenty year old quiet kid
would have removed the right eyeball
and shattered the skull of Donald Trump.
Well bully-bully - one hundred and twenty three years in the wake
of Theodore Roosevelt becoming the nation's chief executive
upon the assassination of William McKinley.
A bullied kid has nearly killed the 21st Century's
Bully in Chief.

Today - four days later, Ramblin' Joe Biden has "got nasty"
with a Bronze Star Democrat...
"It don't mean nothin'" no longer applies.

—John Crandell

Homecoming

I never placed a flower in the barrel of your gun nor
spit on anyone's shoes who made it home.
It was the government I blamed when
I carried signs and chanted into bullhorns for
Peace, peace, peace, please peace,
an end to thousands of years of misplaced power,
the darkening hour.

Today I walked upon 6,000 graves,
finally placing the flowers where they belonged
all along.
I read your names, sometimes out loud,
to remember, remember that you once walked among the living,
and fell in love and laughed into your baby's eyes,
and if you were lucky or blessed, you came home
and wrapped your arms around us all, who were waiting.
Who are waiting still,
for war no more.

No fields of poppies celebrate you this day,
I just got the redwhite blues like flags
fluttering flowers or butterflies,
whispering in the wind, saying
softly, simply,
Thank you.

—L. Rae Hyland

Walt Comisiak: A Life to Remember

Sharri Gertler

Walter Joseph Comisiak passed away peacefully, surrounded by love, on July 24, 2024 (what would have been Barry Romo's birthday). He was a loving partner, father, brother and friend.

Walt was born alongside his twin brother Stanley on August 12, 1945, in Alexandria, Louisiana, to Stanley and Helen Chomisiak. He grew up in Chester, PA, and graduated from Chester High School and Widener College.

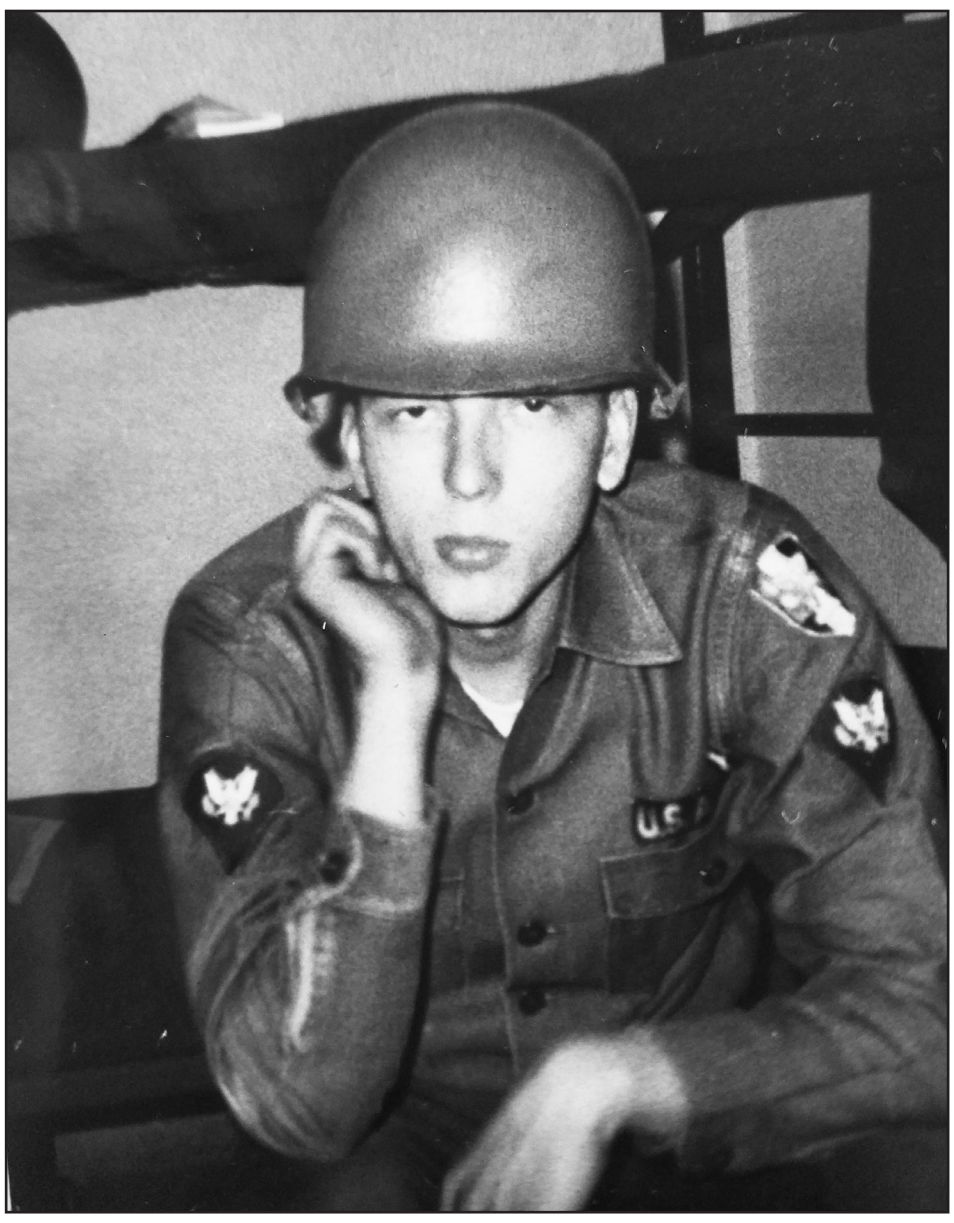
In November 1965, Walt enlisted for Army Technical Training and was stationed in Zelo, Italy, where he received an award as a Missile Maintenance Technician by actor George Jessel.

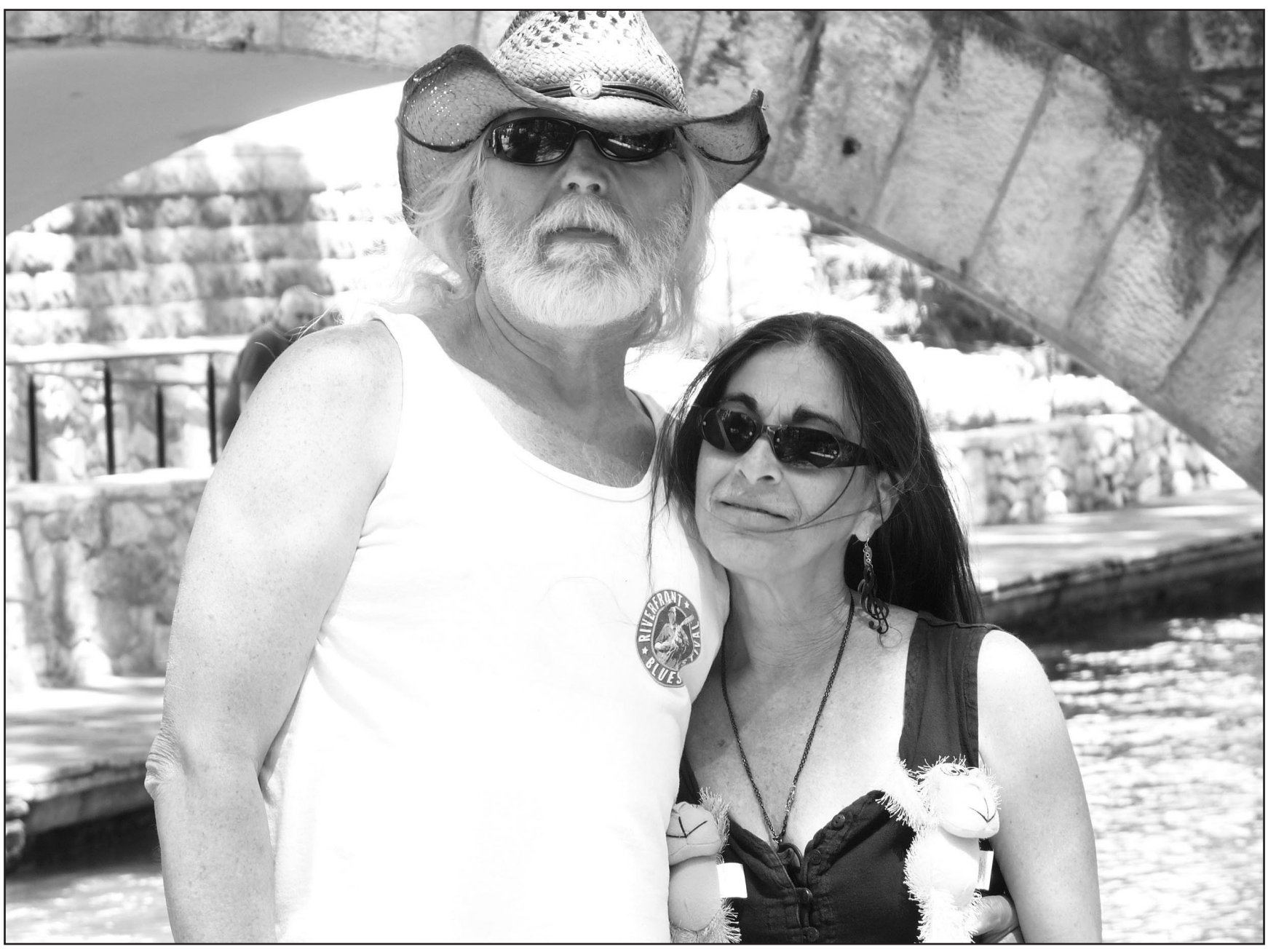
Walt married Joanne Adams in 1970 and had two sons, Jonathan and Jeffrey. Although Walt and Joanne remained friends, the marriage did not last. Walt then moved to the Washington, DC, area, where he met Sharri Gertler, the love of his life, in 1990. They were inseparable right from the start. Their free time was spent taking many long-distance road trips, going to music festivals, dancing, camping, spending time with friends around the fire pit (especially during COVID-19), planting and gardening, preparing for his favorite holiday—Halloween, and just being together. Walt and Sharri volunteered with many food donation programs to give back to the community.

Walt joined the Philadelphia Chapter of VVAW in the early 1970's. He felt it was the best way to peacefully protect the rights of our country. Through this organization he has made life-long friends. Walt's partner will continue to cherish those friendships as her brothers and sisters!

Although Walt was a twin, he was definitely one-of-a-kind. He had an adventurous spirit. He loved life and lived it to the fullest! There has always been so much to love about Walt. With those memories, we can always hold him in our hearts.

Walt is survived by Sharri, his loving partner of 34 years, his sons Jonathan and Jeffrey, four grandchildren, and his sibling, Stanley. Walt is pre-deceased by his younger brother, Gregory.





Walt and Sharri.

Listening Post, December 23rd, 1968

Out here, gazing up at a trillion
flickering stars, I could be anyone.

I could be who I was ten months
ago, lying under a sycamore in

Monterey, Janice snuggled beside
me, just us, us and the stars, and

the moon. But no, I'm here, my head
pressed against a rice paddy dike,

my face blackened, my eyes staring
through a starlight scope. And the

universe is so much smaller. It barely
reaches beyond the rubber trees

around Trang Bang, or our perimeter
of claymore mines. Tracers shoot across

the dark sky like meteors or falling stars,
B-52 bombs pound the far horizon,

flares parachute down like tiny moons,
and I'm here, with Lonny, a thousand

klicks too far from the firebase to
make it back alive. I'm listening to

the distant rat-tat-tat of a firefight,
imagining the whispers of my starlight's

gray shadows low-crawling toward us
through the elephant grass. Any

moment and it could be over, my
hand pressing down on the plunger

to blow everything we have—booby
traps, claymores, flares—and then

running like hell through the jungle,
the bullets, the RPGs, the mortars

to reach Pershing, praying the guards
on the perimeter recognize it's us,

us coming in under fire, us running
hellbent for our Devil-may-care lives.

—rg cantalupo

Dead Children

Fred Samia

Causes are ashes where children lie slain.—Stan Rogers

It's the eyes of the children that you never forget, as well as their smiles and laughter.

Palestinian kids are playing in the dusty streets of the tin roof and cement block shelters of their refugee camps. And playing or running family errands in Beirut's teeming neighborhoods or the alleyways of Damascus, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

There is no fear, though there is reason enough for it, and the smiles are genuine, rising from the pure curiosity of innocence because all children are innocent—especially dead children.

I hear the reports, watch the shaky phone footage of so many more civilians killed today, and play a game with myself—I see those children who shared a minute or many with me, who guided me through the labyrinth of their streets to help me reach my destination. And I see them as they were then, still young, innocent, smiling, and laughing. Even though I know better, I refuse to consider that it could be them lying shattered under the rubble.

Because really, all children are innocent—especially dead children.

In those mnemonic vignettes, details emerge that, from this perspective, can be macabre—the logo T-shirts, "Beisbol," "McDonalds"; the appeals to "take me Amerika." And they are without judgment, even though I am, by my presence there, and as a "journalist," representative of a country whose government has demonized them, censured and sanctioned them, and blindly supports those who are killing them, they see and accept me as a person just like them, smiling and laughing, tripping on their language, in need of help.

Because really, all children are innocent—especially dead children.

Remembering from my safe world, I wish I had spent more time with each of them, learned all their names, the adults too, who were no less genuinely friendly and helpful, and in one instance, when I was surrounded by angry armed young men at a Palestinian funeral in the south of Lebanon, saved not only my camera gear but me as well. I should have shared more of myself and let them know that I intended no harm and that not all Americans hate them—but I realize that's looking for redemption for not doing more to save them from a fate I don't want to consider.

Because really, all children are innocent—especially dead children

I've been telling friends that I want to get rid of all my material possessions, the accumulation of which we all do so well here, to the detriment of our souls and, in many instances, the well-being of others we don't even know. And once so divested, go to the Middle East again and find work with an NGO in some capacity to help, especially the children—but I fear that is just an attempt to assuage my conscience for not actively opposing the killing, not putting my body on the line.

Girls in Beirut, Lebanon.

Are they, those innocent children, alive in me and all whom they touched in a moment of sharing, and if so, does that mean perhaps that a little part of me dies with them? Because the death of every child diminishes us all.

Because really, all children are innocent—especially dead children.

Fred Samia is a freelance journalist who has worked in the Middle East. He served with A Co, 3rd Tanks, 3rd Mar Div, 1967-68; his eight decorations include the Purple Heart. He has been a member of VVAW since 1970.

Boys in Damascus, Syria.

Letter to the Editor

June 29, 2024
Dear Friends,

It's been a while since I contributed to VVAW, so thank you for keeping me on your mailing list. I finally got a chance to sit down and read the Spring 2024 issue of *The Veteran* and was deeply impressed by the essays, obituaries, poetry, book reviews, and the wonderful photo journal of your library work in Vietnam.

I'm not a veteran, but my anti-war activism goes long and deep. I graduated from high school in 1965, where I wrote my social studies essay to refute the US State Department's "White Paper" defending US involvement in SE Asia. In the summer of 1965, I joined a small group of protesters at the dedication of the Hoover Library (in West Branch, IA) when President Johnson came to speak. His motorcade had to pass right by us.

Four of my high school classmates (and friends, I should add since our class consisted of sixty students) entered military service voluntarily and served in Vietnam, where one of them was killed in combat. In an attempt to serve my country in other ways, I joined the Peace Corps and spent two years doing agricultural extension work in India. Returning to the US in the winter of 1969, I was immediately thrust back into the anti-war movement that roiled campuses, including ours at the University of Iowa. I should add that one of my co-volunteers in our Peace Corps group volunteered to serve in Vietnam and was killed in combat.

Since then, I've stood against all our overseas military interventions, from Nicaragua to the first Gulf War, to Desert Storm, to Afghanistan, and now in Gaza. Whenever I can, I join the Iowa City/Cedar Rapids chapter of Veterans for Peace in their demonstrations of educational events.

I believe we're now (again) at a perilous point in our history—similar to what took place in Germany in the 1930s, where fascism came to be accepted. We must redouble our efforts to prevent this from happening again.

In Solidarity,
Jim Walters

Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 1982.

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 55 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

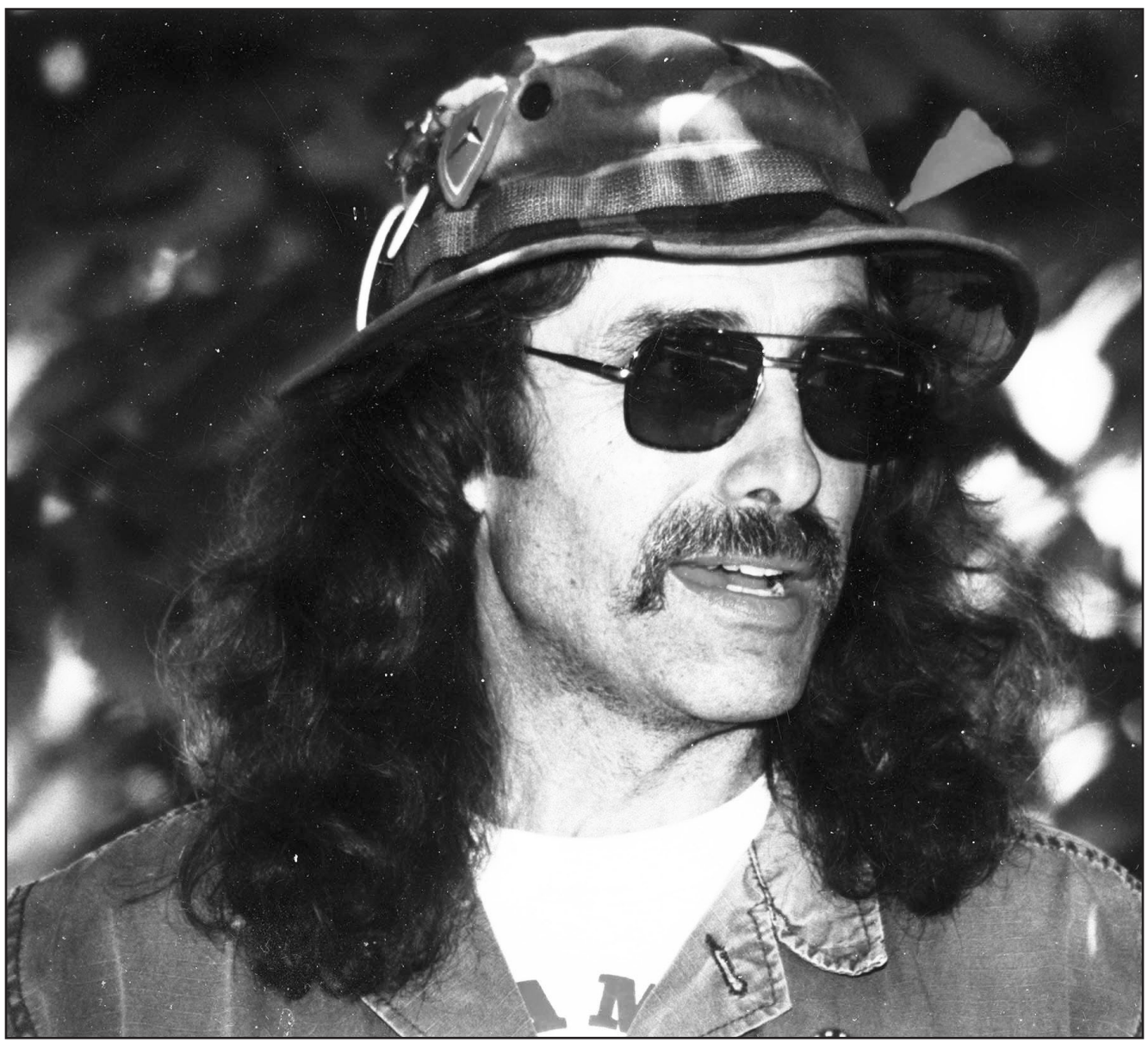
Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.

RECOLLECTIONS

I Missed Woodstock

JOHN LINDQUIST



In my last short article I said I was discharged from the USMC in London, England, on August 8th, 1969. The Commandant had to approve it.

Something I did not mention was that my first wife had asked me for a divorce four days after I returned from Vietnam. This stunned me, at the least. For about six weeks, I said, "No, we can work this out." I was stationed in London with a "Fast Company" with the Marine NATO guard for humanitarian reasons—she was still hospitalized. I finally, reluctantly agreed.

I was smart enough not to tell the Marine Corps, and I'm glad I did this. When my discharge date came around, they were going to fly me back to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. "But Major, I can't go back to the USA now. My wife is still hospitalized, and I am taking care of my baby daughter."

I had set up child support with my In-laws and missed Woodstock! I wanted to go to the Isle of Wight Rock Festival. Thirty-six groups were to perform, including Joe Cocker, Free, Yes, The Who, The Moody Blues, Captain Beefheart, The Band, Bob Dylan, and more. It was on a September Bank Holiday weekend, the first weekend in September: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

It cost about $17, plus train fare and food. I knew I had to find some pot. ;-). But that was a secret! I had to find a quick job. Luckily, I saw a posting at the Marine Barracks in London on the bulletin board.

A Navy Captain, equivalent to a Colonel, needed a painter at ten shillings an hour. Twenty shillings equals a pound. I called the phone number and went to see him in West London. He was reporting to NATO with his family. He needed two rooms painted. I earned enough to buy a ticket to the festival and a train ticket, plus I found another vet who sold me some pot.

He was an Air Force vet who had been stationed in England at the US base in North-West London. It is now an RAF base. He had contacts in London when he was stationed there. He sold to other GIs and returned after discharge to continue in that role and enjoy London as a civilian.

That weekend, I left Victoria Station with a round-trip ticket to RYDE, Isle of Wight—The Beatles Ticket to RYDE. We traveled in an old train coach with a long passageway and rooms for six people, like in the old movies. They transferred the train coaches to a ferry, which took us to the Isle of Wight. Signs at the station pointed the way to the buses. Lots of hippies were talking to the bus.

I had a short military haircut. But I wore my London British police type "Bobbies Cape." I was cool, I thought. I bumped into an American from Boston who brought some Black Hash from Morocco. I had a sleeping bag—I was set.

A big area was fenced off with a big stage, opening every day at 11:00. You had to leave every night. The music stopped at about 01:30. I slept in a farmer's field each night. It did not rain. I also did not have to dig a foxhole. The Isle of Wight usually has lots of rain, so I was lucky.

This festival is still held and is often a mud bowl like part of Woodstock. Tickets now start at about $300 for the weekend. The music was really great. The Who played from start to finish—nonstop. I also got stoned :-).

I returned to London and kissed my month-old Jessica goodbye. I was going to miss her. I flew out of London the day after Labor Day. I flew Air Icelandic to save $17, which was a big mistake. I went from London to Glasglow, Iceland, NYC, and Milwaukee.

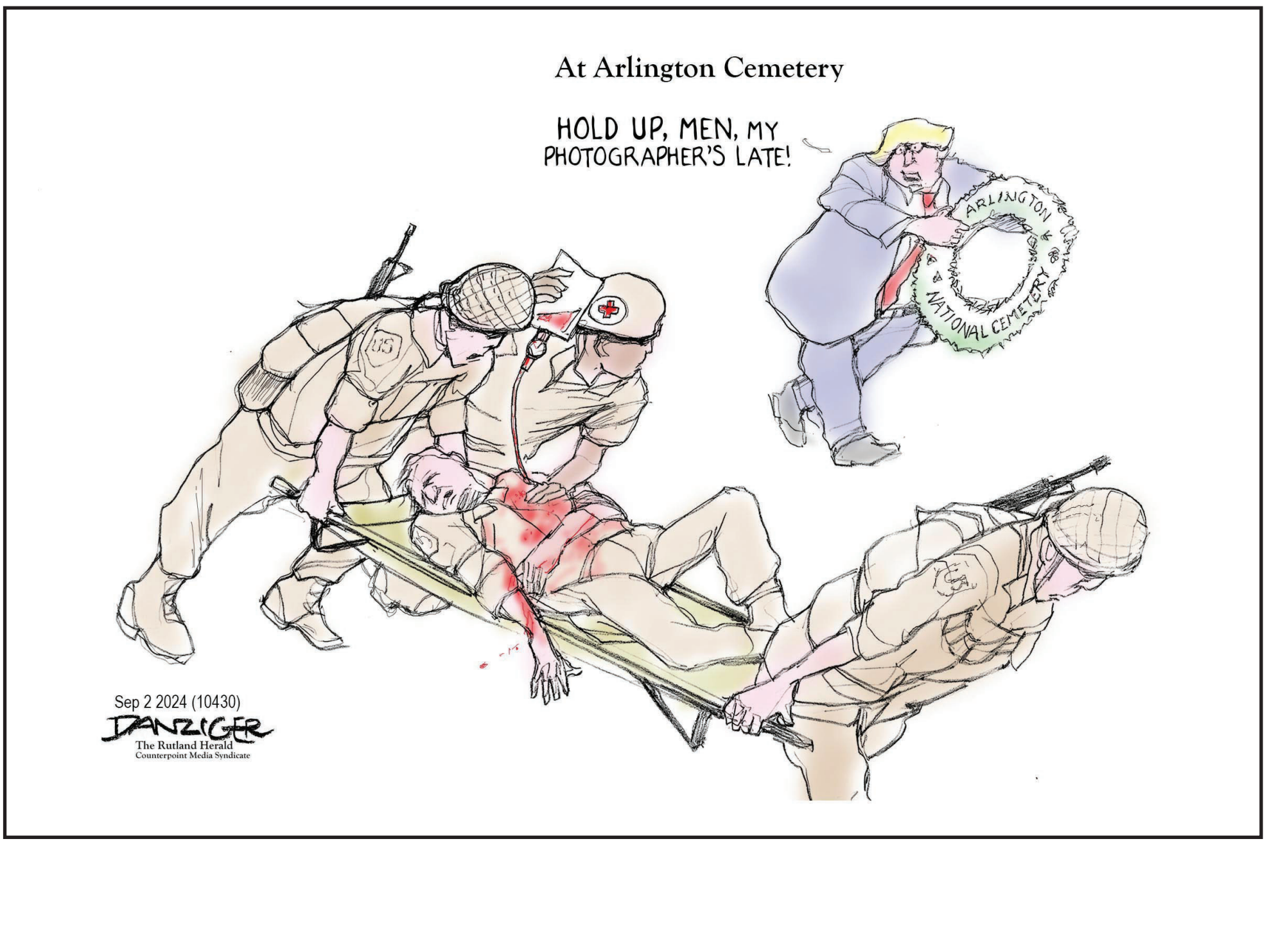
The flight was seventeen hours on a Russian Turboprop plane. A C-130 would have been quieter and faster.

I missed Woodstock, but I experienced a great festival anyways. We still have a home on Fratney Street, Wendy, and I. By the way, my daughter, Jessica, is a Scientist with Yorkshire Water and lives in Sheffield—but that's another story.

Every day is a bonus!

Semper Fidelis.

Stand by Ukraine.

Free the Hostages.

JOHN LINDQUIST IS A LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER FROM MILWAUKEE, NOW LIVING IN ENGLAND.